



## Initial reporting on the ongoing Israeli retaliatory attacks on Gaza (Reporting Period, 7–28 October 2023)

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Al-Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and Palestinian Centre for Human Rights have concluded the first official initial reporting covering the period up to and including 7-28 October 2023. The report covers the first phase of hostilities immediately preceding the ground invasion. Since 7 October 2023, Israeli forces have been conducting a large-scale and unprecedented military offensive

from the air, land, and sea, targeting civilians and civilian objects, and killing and injuring thousands of Palestinians. Horrific mass killings have been committed against Palestinians in Gaza's hospitals, churches and shelters. Thousands of homes have been destroyed, and 70 percent of the population have been displaced from their homes. Further, the Israeli authorities have cut off electricity, food, water, and fuel from Gaza's population. This military offensive came as a retaliatory act hours after a military attack carried out by Palestinian factions on the same Saturday morning of 7<sup>th</sup> October. The factions declared it a response to the escalating Israeli violations against the Palestinian people, including the closure and blockade imposed on Gaza, the daily military raids on West Bank cities, the settlers' storming of Al-Aqsa Mosque, attacks on Palestinian towns in the West Bank, mass arbitrary arrests, and the inhumane treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, as well as the killings, [\[1\]](#) appropriation of lands and natural resources, and house demolitions. Further to the relentless and severe Israeli bombardment, systematic destruction, and displacement

orders that affected approximately 1.4 million Palestinians, including our organizations team members as well as the disruption of telecommunication and internet services, Palestinian human rights organization, Al Mezan, Al-Haq, and the PCHR have faced significant difficulties in documenting the unfolding crimes and reporting on them. Our organizations have been unable to issue the usual press releases on daily events since 12 October 2023, but we have continued to monitor and document violations in a restricted manner according to the limited available resources. Concurrently with the widespread offensive on Gaza, Israeli forces and settlers have escalated their criminal acts and grave human rights violations in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In the reporting period, between 7-28 October, they have killed 113 Palestinians and injured more than 2,000, and have carried out unprecedented mass arrests. This has occurred amid incitement and violence from settlers, who have gone so far as to distribute leaflets demanding that West Bank residents migrate to Jordan. In an unprecedented move, on Friday evening, 27 October 2023, Israeli forces completely cut off telecommunications and internet services in Gaza, a step taken to severely limit internal communication and isolate Gaza from the outside world. The connection was restored two days later on 29 October 2023. This cutoff was coupled with intense bombardment of the Gaza Strip from air, land, and sea. The relentless attacks lasted for hours, leaving behind extensive destruction and a large number of casualties that are difficult to quantify. The disruption of telecommunications and the internet completely paralyzed the healthcare system, ambulance services and medical teams.

On 27 October 2023, the spokesperson for the Israeli army held a press conference in which he gave reasons to justify attacking Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest hospital in Gaza, which besides providing treatment for the injured and the sick, is being used as a shelter for tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians. The pretext given was the alleged presence of tunnels beneath the hospital, a claim repeatedly made by the Israeli authorities that has not been substantiated. The spokesperson subsequently reiterated this justification. The Palestinian human rights organizations express their grave concern that this could be a prelude to justify targeting the hospital, as seen in

previous incidents, potentially leading to a significant number of casualties. This report aims to highlight Israeli crimes and violations over the first 21 days of the widespread Israeli offensive, based on firsthand testimony, documented evidence and information published by official government sources. **Deliberate killings and violation of the right to life** The Israeli forces launched thousands of strikes by air, land, and sea, using massive firepower, missiles and large explosive barrels targeting houses and residential areas, still with their residents inside, as well as places where people were gathered, and vehicles. Israeli forces announce on a daily basis the attacks they carried out with the number ranging from 200 to 450. The majority of strikes, according to our monitoring, are hitting civilian targets and objects, violating the principles of distinction, proportionality, and necessity. **According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MOH), the Israeli attacks conducted in Gaza between 7 and 28 October 2023, resulted in:**

- The killing of 7,703 Palestinians, including 3,195 children, 1,863 women, and 414 elderly people.
- The wounding of 19,743 Palestinians, including 6,168 children and 4,794 women.
- 825 attacks against families, resulting in the death of 5,824 Palestinians.
- Among those killed are 110 medical personnel, 15 members of civil defense crews, and 24 journalists.
- The MOH received 1,800 reports of missing people, including 1,000 children, believed to be still under the rubble of destroyed buildings.

The Palestinian civil defense teams face significant challenges in rescue and recovery operations, due to the shortage of resources specialized equipment, the lack of fuel for vehicles and basic machinery, and the frequent Israeli targeting of rescue teams. Palestinian human rights organizations express their deep concern regarding the health and environmental consequences of hundreds of bodies remaining under the rubble. According to our monitoring, Israeli forces intensified their airstrikes on houses with their residents still inside during this offensive leading to a significant number of casualties and injuries, with the majority being women and children.

Furthermore, our teams monitored the Israeli conduct of bombing entire residential neighborhoods, destroying dozens of homes at once. This occurred in neighborhoods such as the Al-Karama and Al-Yarmouk in Gaza, causing multiple fatalities. On Wednesday 25 October 2023, Israeli warplanes carried out dozens of airstrikes on Al-Yarmouk neighborhood in Gaza, destroying many homes. The recovery of victims continued for two days, during which time rescue teams recovered 120 bodies and rescued 260 injured survivors. As reported by the Ministry of Interior in Gaza, there are 300 still missing. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed by these unprecedented mass killings during this offensive. On 17 October 2023, a significant number of displaced people taking shelter at Al-Ahli Arab Hospital were killed and injured as a result of shelling. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, the attack killed 472 Palestinians and injured hundreds. This atrocity requires an independent international investigation, particularly given that the majority of evidence suggests that the attack resulted from an Israeli airstrike. On 19 October 2023, at least 20 Palestinians were killed and dozens injured in an Israeli attack on the Greek Orthodox Church (Church of Saint Prophyrius) the third oldest church in the world, situated in the center of Gaza City. Hundreds of Palestinians, mostly Christians, had sought refuge in the church. **The systematic destruction of civilian objects** Israeli forces continue their onslaught with thousands of military attacks, systematically destroying houses, residential neighborhoods, civilian structures, roads, and infrastructure. According to the Palestinian human rights organizations, many neighborhoods and communities have been completely obliterated, their landmarks erased or disfigured, and reduced to rubble. All collected data and evidence confirms that the extensive bombing and destruction are not linked to any military necessity. Instead, they form part of a systematic destruction operation within an unprecedented strategy of collective punishment. The Palestinian Ministry of Public Works and Housing reported that the Israeli attacks on Gaza caused damage to more than 200,000 homes, representing approximately 25 percent of the total housing stock in the Gaza Strip. According to monitoring by our teams, the number of destroyed buildings during this offensive far

surpasses that of previous wars and operations. This is attributed to the Israeli forces' escalation of attacks on residential tower blocks, as seen in the case of the Al-Zahra neighborhood, where 25 tower blocks housing thousands of residents were obliterated in less than 48 hours. According to Gaza's Government Media Office, Israeli forces destroyed 79 government offices, along with dozens of facilities and public service structures. They also destroyed 38 mosques and three churches. Furthermore, the Israeli airstrikes targeted 189 schools, rendering 35 of them non-operational. The Israeli bombardment also targeted the Islamic and Al-Azhar universities in Gaza, causing extensive destruction.

**Forcible transfer** Approximately 1.4 million Palestinian civilians have been forced to evacuate their homes. They sought refuge in what were considered to be safe shelters after hundreds of their homes and properties were directly or indirectly targeted by Israeli warplanes. According to the most recent update from UNRWA on October 25, 2023, approximately 629,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) are currently sheltering in 150 UNRWA facilities across the Gaza Strip. The remaining IDPs have sought refuge in unofficial shelters in northern Gaza or with relatives. In a decision announcing forced displacement of the population, Israeli forces instructed over 1.5 million Palestinians residing in northern Gaza areas to move to the southern areas of Wadi Gaza. On 13 October 2023, Israeli authorities ordered over one million Palestinians in the northern areas of Wadi Gaza (Gaza City and North Gaza District) to evacuate their homes and move to the southern districts of Rafah, Khan Younis and the Middle Area District, including Deir al-Balah, Al-Nuseirat, Al-Maghazi, Al-Bureij, and Al-Zawayda. Israeli forces continued to force the residents of northern Gaza to evacuate to the south through threatening official statements, phone calls and with direct bombing. The situation escalated to the extent that they directed hospitals to evacuate with threats of bombardment. On 21 October 2023, Israeli warplanes dropped warning leaflets on Gaza's northernmost districts. The leaflets said: "An urgent warning to the residents of the Gaza Strip. Your presence in the north of Wadi Gaza puts your lives at risk. Those who choose not to evacuate from the North of the Strip to south of Wadi Gaza could potentially be identified as accomplices in a

terrorist organization.” Despite Israel's request for residents to move to the south of Wadi Gaza, they targeted them on multiple occasions during the evacuation. Israeli forces also repeatedly bombed shelter centers, as was the case in the Al-Maghazi and Khan Younis camps. Moreover, Israeli forces bombed dozens of homes where displaced Palestinians had sought refuge with relatives or friends, killing dozens and injuring hundreds. This betrays the deception of the Israeli narrative regarding a safe zone and reinforces our previous conclusion that there is no safe place in Gaza. As hundreds of thousands of people headed toward south Gaza, especially to Khan Younis and Rafah, immense pressure was exerted on the already severely disrupted services in Gaza. Hundreds of tents have been set up by UNRWA in Khan Younis to shelter displaced Palestinians, in a scene reminiscent of the Palestinian Nakba. As a result of Israel's intensive bombardment which has focused in recent days on the southern Gaza districts, hundreds of families returned to their homes in northern Gaza, taking the risk of going back amid repeated Israeli threats of evacuation and the carpet bombing carried out by hundreds of attacks on neighborhoods in the northern areas. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had sought refuge in UNRWA shelters suddenly found themselves without the bare minimum necessities for survival. Despite the efforts of UNRWA and other international relief organizations, the provision of basic necessities such as water and food has been limited and this amid unprecedented overcrowding, giving rise to the outbreak of diseases, and sparking concerns about the potential of epidemics. Considering Israel's seven-decade record of forced displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, our organizations express grave concerns about the current Israeli plans to forcibly displace large numbers of Palestinians from Gaza. **Starvation, dehydration, and power cuts:** Israeli forces have maintained a strict closure on Gaza since the beginning of its offensive, preventing the entry of essential supplies such as food, water, and medicine. After about two weeks of the offensive, only a limited number of trucks were permitted entry via the Rafah crossing, with a particular emphasis on directing them to the southern areas of Gaza. At the onset of the offensive, the Israeli Minister of Energy, Israel Katz,

decided to cease the supply of electricity to Gaza. Further, the Israeli authorities cut off water supplied from the Israeli water company to Gaza, depriving citizens of 50 percent of their water needs at once. The depletion of fuel led to the malfunction of the majority of water wells in Gaza, creating an unprecedented water crisis. On 9 October 2023, the Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, [stated](#): “We are imposing a complete siege on [Gaza]. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel – everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly”. This statement officially recognizes and declares the Israeli government's intention of using starvation and dehydration, alongside killing and destruction, as methods of warfare. This unprecedented conduct is being employed amid international silence that may amount to complicity. Further, Israeli forces bombed ten bakeries, some of which had received flour from UNRWA. They also targeted shops and commercial centers, such as the Abu Dalal Commercial Center, and warehouses of food supplies in Gaza. This indicates an executive decision to deprive civilians of access to the remaining food supplies in Gaza. According to our fieldworkers, Israeli warplanes targeted many poultry farms and large areas of agricultural land. They also targeted farmers attempting to reach their fields. This appears to form part of an effort to limit Palestinian access to food supplies. On 11 October 2023, Gaza was plunged into complete darkness after Gaza's only power plant shut down. Only facilities and houses equipped with alternative solar energy had power, and some others are able to function temporarily on small generators until fuel supplies run out. The power crisis significantly impacted various services in Gaza, including water supplies, telecommunications, and internet services, leaving Gaza in almost complete isolation from the world with a tight closure of entry and exit points. Besides the scarcity of fuel, the Israeli bombing has also crippled many municipal facilities, rendering them unable to provide water and essential services to citizens. This has led to the breakdown of waste disposal systems and portends an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Hundreds of thousands have been forced to consume contaminated water due to the lack of clean water sources, resulting in serious health implications. Gaza has only received a very small amount of

humanitarian aid since 21 October 2023, totaling 84 trucks in the reporting period until 28 October. Most of these trucks carried water, food, and medicines, but this is vastly inadequate compared to the previous daily inflow of 500 trucks to Gaza before October 7. The distribution of aid has been limited to the southern Gaza districts, according to Israeli directives. The disruption of life and the closure of crossings in and out of Gaza have exacerbated the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian daily workers who used to cross to work in Israel, who are now without any source of income. This also applies to employees who have not been able to receive their salaries. These troubling conditions prevail in a reality already fragile, as the unemployment rate among youth and graduates in Gaza stands at 70 percent.

**Targeting medical crews, hospitals, and rescue teams:** Israeli forces have indiscriminately targeted Palestinian medical crews and civil defense teams through direct and indirect attacks while on duty. These attacks have added an extra burden on these crews, hindering their ability to carry out their duties and preventing them from recovering hundreds of casualties under the rubble of bombed houses and buildings. The MOH announced the killing of 101 medical personnel, some of whom were killed while on duty, whilst the majority were killed due to the bombardment of homes and facilities. Additionally, 25 ambulances were destroyed and rendered unusable. It was also reported that Israeli airstrikes struck 57 health facilities, leading to 12 hospitals and 32 primary care centers going out of service either due to direct targeting or to the lack of fuel supply. Our staff took testimonies from administrators of many hospitals in Gaza; they stated that they had received 'phone calls from the Israeli intelligence, ordering them to evacuate their hospitals, including all hospitals in the North Gaza district: Al-Ahli Arab Hospital (which was later bombed), Al-Quds Hospital (the vicinity of which was the subject of intense bombing), and Al-Wafa Hospital. The threat of evacuation was not limited to hospitals in northern Gaza, but was also directed at the Kuwaiti Hospital in Rafah. In most cases, medical teams refused to evacuate their hospitals due to the lack of alternatives for accommodating thousands of patients and injured individuals. The MOH declared the collapse of the



healthcare system in Gaza hospitals, which now face imminent suspension of many services due to the fuel crisis. This includes the disruption of services for newborn babies, kidney dialysis patients and cancer patients. All this was experienced by a health system already in crisis due to the shortage of medications and medical provisions. **Killing journalists and targeting media institutions:** Israeli forces have committed multiple crimes against journalists and media workers as well as against media institutions during this offensive, violating their right to protection guaranteed under international law. Data collected by human rights organizations indicates that the Israeli attacks on the press, including the deliberate killing and threats to the personal safety of journalists, as well as the bombardment of media headquarters, form part of a deliberate campaign to isolate Gaza from the rest of the world and to silence them. This is done with the motive of drawing a veil over Israel's crimes against civilians. According to the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate, as of 27 October 2023, 24 journalists had been killed and dozens injured in the Israeli offensive. Furthermore, the headquarters of 50 media institutions had been bombed. Our teams report that some journalists were targeted while on duty, while others were killed inside their homes. Israeli forces targeted the houses of many journalists, killing members of their families. There are concerns that this is part of a deliberate campaign to intimidate and silence journalists. A notable case is that of Al-Jazeera's correspondent Wael al-Dahdouh, whose family, including his wife, son and daughter, along with other relatives, were killed in an Israeli attack on the house in which they had sought refuge in Al-Nusairat, in the Middle Area District, on 25 October 2023.

**Cutting off telecommunications and internet services** In an unprecedented move, Israeli forces took the drastic step of completely cutting off telecommunications and internet services in the Gaza Strip at around 6 pm on Friday, 27 October 2023. This severed internal communication and isolated Gaza from the rest of the world. The Palestinian Telecommunications Company announced a total disruption of all communication and internet services in the Gaza Strip, because Israeli airstrikes had destroyed the last remaining international routes connecting Gaza to the outside world, in addition to

other routes previously damaged during the offensive. This cutoff was accompanied by intensive Israeli bombardment by air, land, and sea all over the Gaza Strip, which persisted for hours without pause, leaving behind massive destruction and a significant number of casualties. Palestinian human rights organizations express grave concern that the cutting off of communications and the internet, the killing of many journalists and the intimidation of others to target their families, constitutes a grim harbinger of yet more atrocities to come, committed out of sight of the outside world. This is particularly sinister at a point when the Israeli military forces announced the commencement of a ground invasion. The disruption of communications and the internet have completely paralyzed the ability of the healthcare system, ambulances, and medical teams to communicate and locate people injured during Israeli attacks on Gaza. Palestinian human rights organizations express their deep concern that the cutting of communications and internet services hinders citizens from reporting from locations hit by shelling, thus preventing timely arrival of ambulance and civil defense crews for rescue operations. Victims have been observed arriving at hospitals on carts pulled by donkeys and horses due to the lack of transportation and alternative means of communication. Furthermore, the disruption of communications has resulted in national and international human rights and humanitarian organizations, losing contact with their teams and staff in Gaza. This hindered our ability to obtain information about serious human rights violations. Palestinian human rights organizations emphasize that the non-stop Israeli airstrikes and the power cuts in recent days caused disruption to communications and internet services in many neighborhoods. Networks remained available to a very limited extent, facilitating minimal communication, before being completely cut off.

**Use of destructive projectiles and prohibited weapons against civilians** Data collected by our teams indicates that Israeli forces used various types of weapons and destructive projectiles against Palestinian civilians and their properties during their continuous offensive on Gaza. The Israeli forces launched thousands of missiles, shells and guided bombs, each weighing around 1,000 kilograms, from the air, land, and sea, on

Gaza. Furthermore, our teams observed that guided bombs and explosive barrels were very often dropped on residential areas, resulting in massive destruction and thousands of casualties. In addition to that which our teams have witnessed directly, our organizations received testimonies regarding the use of white phosphorus by Israeli forces against residential areas in several neighborhoods in Gaza. White phosphorus is a flammable chemical component causing second and third-degree burns upon contact with the skin. It poses a serious threat to the lives of civilians, leading to severe injuries and can resulting death when it comes into contact with the skin or is inhaled or ingested. The information gathered by our teams indicates that a significant number of the injured suffered severe burns and lacerations. Some medical staff have expressed concerns regarding the use of white phosphorus munitions, along with new projectiles that have not been previously employed, causing this type of severe harm and injury. Using white phosphorus in densely populated civilian areas has severe consequences and constitutes a blatant violation of the principles of international customary law related to the principle of distinction and the necessary precautions during military attacks. These principles require taking the highest levels of precaution in using appropriate means and methods to prevent civilian casualties. Using lethal weapons against civilians in a disproportionate and indiscriminate manner constitutes a war crime. Preliminary data indicates that Israeli forces are deliberately harming Palestinian civilians through the employment and utilization of overwhelming destructive force, without regard to the standards of international law related to the principles of proportionality and distinction. **Serious violations in the West Bank:** Simultaneously with the large-scale offensive on Gaza, Israeli forces escalated their violations in the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem. Since the beginning of the offensive and 28 October, Israeli forces and settlers killed 113 Palestinians, including 35 children, and injured more than 2,000, thirty of whom are in a critical condition, in the West Bank. The majority of the Palestinian civilian killings were due to Israel's excessive use of force during the crackdown on protests and raids into Palestinian cities. Two Palestinians were killed inside Israeli prisons shortly after they

were arrested, amid concerns and reports that they had been subjected to torture. Meanwhile eight Palestinians were shot dead by settlers. Israeli forces have conducted unprecedented mass arrest campaigns in the West Bank, detaining around 80-100 Palestinians a day. As of 7 October 2023, a total of 1,530 Palestinians have been arrested, in addition to thousands of Gazan workers who are held in special facilities in Israel. The extremist Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, distributed at least 12,000 M16 rifles to settlers in the West Bank, in the presence of the Israeli police and the media. He announced the formation of a militia under his command. The settlers subsequently carried out hundreds of attacks, including shootings, on residential areas and agricultural lands. They also distributed leaflets demanding that Palestinians in the West Bank leave to Jordan. Our organizations have documented that 65 Palestinians, including 31 children, were displaced after Israeli forces destroyed the houses of 14 Palestinian families in the West Bank. Israeli forces also demolished the homes of four families as part of their policy of collective punishment, leading to the displacement of 20 Palestinians. Since the beginning of the offensive on Gaza, Israeli forces have closed 108 checkpoints between West Bank cities. They also added at least 10 iron gates between cities and towns, completely closing them and preventing residents from using bypass roads. They have threatened to kill anyone attempting to cross these roads, and this threat was realized with the killing of a resident in Hebron and another in Qalqilya. Additionally, at least 20 Palestinians were seriously and moderately injured on bypass roads between Nablus, Qalqilya, and Hebron.

**Recommendations** In response to the ongoing Israeli offensive, particularly with the threat of a large-scale ground invasion and the continued policy of collective punishment that restricts the residents of Gaza from enjoying their economic and social rights, including the right to health, the three Palestinians human rights organizations now issue an urgent call for:

- An immediate ceasefire and an end to the Israeli offensive on Gaza;
- An immediate opening of the Rafah and all other crossings and securing urgent humanitarian corridors (with guarantees of the right of return), and

guaranteeing the unconditional and unrestricted entry of all essential supplies to Gaza—food, water, fuel and medicine;

- Permission to wounded people to travel for treatment;
- Permission to medical teams to enter by Israel;
- The international community to urge Israel to restore water and electricity supplies to the civilian population in Gaza and ensure that the delivery of humanitarian aid and relief will not be conditional or limited to Gaza's southern districts. Humanitarian aid must reach all areas, including Gaza's northern districts, and be distributed equitably to all Gaza residents, hospitals and other civilian facilities, in places of their choice.
- All UN agencies involved in the delivery of aid and relief—including the WHO, the WFP, OCHA and UNICEF—to adhere to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence, impartiality and humanity and to categorically reject Israeli-imposed conditions aimed at forcibly transferring Palestinians from north to south Gaza.
- The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to refrain from double standards and avoid selective political agendas in cases related to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, as well as ethnic cleansing, and to take appropriate mechanisms to investigate these crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable.
- The international community— in particular the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 - to pressure Israeli authorities to immediately cease their offensive, to stop the collective punishment policy against civilians, to uphold their legal obligations towards the residents of Gaza, including patients, and ensure the provision of appropriate and secure mechanisms for their travel to receive treatment outside Gaza.
- The Israeli authorities in the West Bank to cease their retaliatory policies against civilians and release detainees who are being held without justification, used as hostages to exert pressure on Palestinian factions.

- Immediate international intervention to protect Palestinians in Gaza from genocide, and all States who have leverage on Israel- particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union and its Member States - should exercise it and demand that Israel complies with international humanitarian law.

[\[1\]](#) Israeli forces and settlers killed 234 Palestinians, including 45 children, between 1 January and 30 September 2023.

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