

# The Israeli army's use of Palestinian civilians as human shields has been documented on a large scale



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Israel-Palestinian Territory

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**Palestinian Territory** - Video footage released by Al Jazeera TV shows the Israeli army using detained Palestinian civilians as human shields and compelling them to enter dangerous combat zones—evidence of a systematic tactic of the army. There are numerous documented instances of civilians being used as human shields by Israeli forces, which is considered a war crime.

The leaked horrific scenes that were obtained and published by Al Jazeera reveal how the Israeli army uses civilians, including injured detainees, as human shields and forces them into hazardous combat zones after installing cameras on their bodies and binding them with rope. Each of the aforementioned acts of criminal, brutal, and inhumane behaviour constitutes a grave violation of the rules of international humanitarian law, and is a full-fledged war crime. These crimes, and dozens of similar cases, require urgent intervention from the international justice system to ensure the protection of civilians, prevent their use as human shields, and hold the Israeli political and military perpetrators.

Following the commencement of the Israeli army's ground operations at the end of October 2023, numerous documented cases have shown that the Israeli army has exploited Palestinian civilians by using them as human shields. These civilians have been forced to engage in military operations that directly endanger their lives, such as breaking into buildings or tunnels or searching for possible explosives and tunnels. Others have been detained in homes and conflict zones, endangering their lives and violating international humanitarian law.

The Israeli army has repeatedly used people as human shields, with numerous instances of this behaviour documented throughout the West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip. This is an expansion of a long-standing strategy employed by the Israeli army during times of escalation or during its frequent incursions into the West Bank.

The Euro-Med Monitor field team documented a compound and comprehensive crime against a civilian family on 27 June 2024. A family comprising an elderly woman and her four children, including three young women and a one-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter, was attacked with gunfire and bombs by Israeli forces who stormed their house in the Gaza City neighbourhood of Al-Shujaiya. They were later taken outside and detained for over three hours near Israeli tanks in a dangerous combat zone, despite the injuries they sustained in the initial attack on their home, and were used as human shields. The 65-year-old mother, identified as Safiya Hassan Musa Al-Jamal, was run over by an Israeli tank and killed in front of her son.

The Israeli army also used 59-year-old doctor Yahya Khalil Deeb Al-Kayyali and a number of his family members as human shields on 20 March 2024, after storming their house and forcing Al-Kayyali to stand on the balcony during an exchange of fire with gunmen west of Gaza City.

During the Shifa Medical Complex raid in March 2024, Israeli forces used civilians, including patients and displaced individuals sheltering inside the Complex, as human shields. To protect their military operations within the hospital and its vicinity, Israeli forces exploited Palestinian civilians by making them form human barriers to surround Israeli soldiers and military vehicles, or sending them under threat to residential homes and buildings to either help arrest or forcibly evacuate other civilians before army raids and the subsequent destruction of many of these buildings.

One Palestinian, identified only as K.F., who requested anonymity due to safety concerns, spoke with Euro-Med Monitor about sheltering in the Shifa Medical Complex. He stated that Israeli forces ordered him and three other young men to enter several rooms inside the Complex after cameras were attached to their heads. They were then forced to move towards and inspect specific locations, by remote orders issued by the Israeli army. He added that they forced him to move through the General Surgery building for several continuous hours before he was ultimately forcibly evacuated with his wife and daughter; he knows nothing about the fate of the other young men used by the Israeli army as human shields in the same incident.

M.N, an elderly man in his sixties who also requested anonymity due to safety reasons, stated that the Israeli army forced his eldest son to enter the basements of the Shifa Medical Complex as well as its sewage areas, while he witnessed other detainees being placed inside armored vehicles during the fighting. Others were forced to stand behind the Israeli army forces and military vehicles stationed at the entrances of the Complex to prevent any targeting of them.

In another testimony, the wife of a nurse forced by the Israeli army to evacuate the Complex towards the city of Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip said that she witnessed Israeli forces using her husband as a human shield to open doors to sections in the Shifa Medical Complex for several consecutive hours. She stated that her husband's fate remains unknown, and she fears for his safety.

Furthermore, several families residing near the Shifa Medical Complex reported that Israeli forces arrested young men from inside the medical facility, then used them to enter the families' homes and demand that they immediately evacuate to the central and southern Strip.

A woman from the Arafat family informed the Euro-Med Monitor team that they were surprised by the entry of a man in his late 30s, stripped of his clothes except for his underwear. He

informed them that the Israeli army sent him to tell them to evacuate their home within 30 minutes and had threatened to bomb it over their heads. Upon their evacuation, as ordered, the Arafat family witnessed several other Palestinian youths in similar situations, i.e. being forced to enter neighbouring homes to warn residents.

Similar incidents were also reported in the West Bank, such as the Israeli army's use of the injured civilian Mujahid Fayyad as a human shield on 22 June. Israeli forces pinned him to the front of a military jeep and roamed through Jenin's Jabriyat neighbourhood, which was the scene of an Israeli military incursion and armed clashes.

A comparable incident occurred when the Israeli army detained Wafa Nayef Jarrar, 49, on 21 May and purposefully put her life in danger by holding her for four hours in a high conflict zone. She suffered serious injuries as a result, as she was trapped in a military Jeep in a physically unsafe position, leading to the amputation of her legs.

Additionally, the Israeli army utilised three Palestinian children as human shields during its invasion of the Tulkarm refugee camp in the northern West Bank on 5 and 6 May. The children were made to walk in front of the soldiers as they searched residences and asked people to evacuate their homes. Israeli soldiers shot two of the children after resting their rifles on their shoulders.

Euro-Med Monitor previously issued a detailed report titled "Israeli Matrix of Control: Use of Palestinian civilians as human shields", documenting cases of Palestinian civilians used as human shields by Israeli military forces during the 50-day conflict in the Gaza Strip (8 July–26 August 2014). According to the report, Israeli forces used Palestinian civilians as human shields in at least six instances in the southern Gaza Strip city of Khan Yunis to protect Israeli soldiers or vehicles during their ground incursion of the area. One of the cases involved the use of a child as a human shield.

The Israeli army has used Palestinian civilians as human shields, deliberately putting them in strategic places and in front of military targets, in an attempt to prevent attacks, fortify its forces in the Gaza Strip, facilitate its military operations and obstruct corresponding military operations. When conducting ground incursions and military attacks, the Israeli army purposefully used Palestinian civilians to guard its forces' assembly points. It also made them

step in front of military vehicles when it stormed homes and buildings it thought were booby-trapped.

According to the principles of customary international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions and their First Protocol, as well as other international humanitarian law regulations, it is strictly forbidden to use civilians and any other protected groups as human shields during armed conflicts. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court views the use of civilians and other protected individuals as human shields as a war crime. It is therefore imperative that the perpetrators of these crimes face international judicial accountability and that justice be achieved for the victims.

The international community must fulfil its obligations under international law to protect Palestinian civilians from crimes and violations committed by the Israeli army against them throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including defending them against the crime of genocide perpetrated by Israel against them in the Gaza Strip, imposing effective sanctions on Israel, and ceasing all forms of political, financial, and military support and cooperation provided to Israel. The international community also needs to address the root cause of the violence, which is the suffering and persecution of the Palestinian people over a period of 76 years, and work promptly to end Israeli settler colonialism and the occupation of Palestinian land, the 17-year Israeli siege on Gaza, and the apartheid regime imposed against all Palestinians in the region.