



PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
רופאים לזכויות אדם לחقوق الإنسان

ISRAEL

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Urgent

Re: Call for the immediate arrangement of a channel for civilians to escape the battle zone.

1. This appeal is concerned with the absence of any secure area in the Gaza Strip to which civilians can escape to protect their lives and ensure their safety and that of their families. We demand the immediate opening of an escape route for civilians to escape the battle zone.
2. The offensive in the Gaza Strip has resulted in widespread injury to the civilian population. At the time of writing, and since the fighting began, at least 718 people have been killed, with most sources and estimates indicating that at least 70% of those killed were civilians who were not involved in the hostilities. Over 140,000 people have abandoned their homes and taken shelter in UNWRA buildings. In addition to serious damage to the water and electricity infrastructure, there has been serious damage to hospitals and medical institutions and destruction of residential buildings.
3. Reports received in the last hours (16:00 on July 24) indicate that areas that were supposed to be safe, and to which residents were to be evacuated, for example the UNWRA school in Beit Hanoun, have been damaged by shelling, and there are so far reports of at least 8 dead and dozens of wounded.
4. During the operation, the army demanded complete evacuation of certain areas in the Gaza Strip, among them Beit Lahiya, Zeitoun and Shaja'iyya. This demand is almost impossible to implement, due to, among other reasons, the density of the population in the Gaza Strip as well as our understanding and that of the residents, that there is no area that can be defined as safe from shelling and the civilians are unable to know which will be the be the next area that the army will attack or they will be told to evacuate.
5. An effective warning from the army to civilians should clearly indicate not only

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which area they should evacuate, but also where they will be safe and how they can move there freely and with no harm.

6. This is also relevant with regard to the evacuation of the wounded: according to the information we have received, from conversations with relevant organizations active in the Gaza Strip and from involvement in cases of wounded who required evacuation, it is clear that the military does not allow a reasonable degree of activity by rescue teams, and many wounded remain for long hours with no assistance and no option for evacuation. Coordination between rescue teams and the army does not guarantee protection from military fire, and evacuation of and care for the wounded involves real danger to the lives of the medical teams, and is sometimes not even possible.
7. Israel's responsibility for the protection of Gaza's residents is clear in the light of its almost absolute control of the battle zones and access routes to them, not to mention the long-standing control of Gaza borders, airspace and territorial waters, etc.
8. Without minimizing Israel's duty to avoid harm to civilians and ensure safe evacuation of the wounded, we call for an immediate opening of a channel for civilians and the wounded to escape the battle zone and declaring a safe shelter zone, while ensuring their ability to return at the end of the fighting. Additionally it is incumbent on Israel to ensure that effective humanitarian aid given to people staying in any secure area meets the civilians' needs and allows medical treatment to the wounded.

Signed,

Hedva Radovanitz, Executive Director, Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights

Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director, B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

Adv. Eitan Diamond, Executive Director, Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement



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Raia Yaron, Machsom Watch – Women against Occupation and for Human Rights

Adv. Sharon Abraham-Weiss, Executive Director, Association for Civil Rights in Israel

Dr. Ishai Menuchin, Executive Director, Public Committee Against Torture in Israel

Dalia Kerstein, Executive Director, HaMoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual

Adv. Neta Patrick, Executive Director, Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights

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