

Israel Accused of ‘Blatant War Crime’ as Human Rights Watch Confirms White Phosphorus Used in Gaza

"Any time that white phosphorus is used in crowded civilian areas, it poses a high risk of excruciating burns and lifelong suffering," said one Human Rights Watch official.

By [Brett Wilkins](#)

Global Research, October 13, 2023

[Common Dreams](#) 12 October 2023

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

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Human Rights Watch on Thursday [said](#) it has confirmed reports that Israeli military forces unleashed white phosphorus munitions during artillery attacks on targets in Lebanon and Gaza this week, including over a heavily populated civilian area of the besieged Palestinian strip—an apparent war crime.

HRW said it has interviewed witnesses and verified video footage shot in Lebanon and Gaza on Tuesday and Wednesday “showing multiple airbursts of artillery-fired white phosphorus over the Gaza City port and two rural locations along the Israel-Lebanon border.”

The HRW announcement came as Israeli forces continue to bombard Gaza from air, land, and sea in an assault that has [killed](#) more than 1,500 Palestinians, including at least 500 children, in retaliation for Hamas’ surprise infiltration of Israel and killing of over 1,300 Israeli soldiers and civilians.

BREAKING: Israel has used white phosphorus in military operations in Gaza and Lebanon, putting civilians at risk of serious and long-term injuries.

White phosphorus causes excruciating burns and can set homes afire. Its use in populated areas is unlawful. <https://t.co/TbCVA5Qynpic.twitter.com/4UKANHTwI2>

— Human Rights Watch (@hrw) [October 12, 2023](#)

As HRW explained Thursday:

Upon contact, white phosphorus can burn people, thermally and chemically, down to the bone as it is highly soluble in fat and therefore in human flesh. White phosphorus fragments can exacerbate wounds even after treatment and can enter the bloodstream and cause multiple organ failure. Already dressed wounds can reignite when dressings are removed and the wounds are reexposed to oxygen. Even relatively minor burns are often fatal. For survivors, extensive scarring tightens muscle tissue and creates physical disabilities.

WP burns as hot as 1,500°F. Water does not extinguish it.

“Any time that white phosphorus is used in crowded civilian areas, it poses a high risk of excruciating burns and lifelong suffering,” HRW Middle East and North Africa director Lama Fakih said in a [statement](#). “White phosphorous is unlawfully indiscriminate when airburst in populated urban areas, where it can burn down houses and cause egregious harm to civilians.”

The israeli regime is using internationally-prohibited white phosphorus to bomb Gaza’s Sea Port & cause maximum suffering [@OnlinePalEng pic.twitter.com/GuLkWbp52T](#)

— Sarah Wilkinson (@swilkinsonbc) [October 11, 2023](#)

“To avoid civilian harm, Israel should stop using white phosphorus in populated areas,” Fakih added. “Parties to the conflict should be doing everything they can to spare civilians from further suffering.”

HRW previously [accused](#) Israel of war crimes for using WP munitions in densely populated areas—including over a United Nations school—during the 2008-09 Operation Cast Lead invasion of Gaza. In response to a 2013 [petition](#) to Israel’s High Court of Justice filed by human rights groups including HRW, the Israel Defense Forces [said](#) it would no longer use WP in populated areas, with “very narrow exceptions” that it would not disclose.

Israel used white phosphorus, an illegal chemical weapon, against Palestinians in Gaza, [@HRW](#) confirms.

White phosphorus causes severe burns upon contact with skin—burns on just 10% of your body can be deadly. Israel’s use of it on civilians is a blatant war crime.

— IMEU (@theIMEU) [October 12, 2023](#)

Other countries’ militaries also use WP, most notably the United States, which [fired](#) the incendiary rounds during the 2004 battle for Fallujah and elsewhere in the so-called War on Terror.

In 2016, Saudi Arabia was [condemned](#) for allegedly firing U.S.-supplied WP munitions

against Houthi rebels in Yemen. WP and other incendiary weapons have also been used by Syrian government and [Russian](#) forces fighting Islamic State and other militants during the Syrian civil war. Turkey has also been [accused](#) of firing WP rounds at Kurdish civilians in Syria.

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Brett Wilkins is a staff writer for Common Dreams.

Featured image: An Israeli white phosphorus round (right) airbursts over densely populated Gaza City, Palestine on October 11, 2023. (Photo: Ali Jadallah/Anadolu via Getty Images)

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