

Israel expects army officers to be prosecuted for war crimes

By [Global Research](#)

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The Israeli government is preparing defenses for a “wave of international lawsuits” expected over its offensive in Gaza.

The government believes Israeli army officers and soldiers will be sued over actions in the 21-day old offensive which began on December 27.

A number of human rights organizations, and the International Red Cross, have already indicated they are looking at breaches of international law. The whole question of the legality of the Gaza War is also being examined.

Amnesty International has written to the United Nations Security Council calling for the establishment of full accountability for crimes committed in the Gaza conflict and for deployment of human rights monitors.

In the letter, Amnesty says it wants the Security Council to “take firm action to ensure full accountability for war crimes and other serious abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law.”

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has ordered the Israeli army to establish a task force comprising operational, intelligence, and legal experts, to assemble information, documentation, and footage of military operations during the offensive, which will assist in the defence of officers against legal actions expected to be filed by a number of international bodies.

The task force named “Incrimination Team” is presently examining all footage taken by the Israeli army of the Gaza operation since it began.

Israeli Attorney General Menahem Mazuz warned the government earlier this week a “wave of international lawsuits” was expected.

“We need to be prepared for the potential lawsuits that will be filed against senior officers,” a defense official told The Jerusalem Post. “The team will review the footage and intelligence information and formulate arguments that can be used to defend against claims that Israel committed war crimes in Gaza.” The footage collected by the team was filmed by regular combat soldiers who received special training on how to film and document military operations under combat conditions.

What will hamper legal actions brought on by international groups is that virtually the only footage and documentation of the violence in Gaza will be that produced by the Israeli

army. Israel has banned the entry of journalists, TV camera crews, and photographers from Gaza, a decision that preceded the commencement of the offensive. The Israel High Court has ruled the ban illegal and ordered the government and army to allow news media to enter the Strip. The court order has not been complied with.

Israel is accused of bombing schools, including some run by the United Nations, mosques, government buildings, and homes. Hundreds of civilians, including women and children have been killed by bombs, artillery shelling and tank fire. Israel has also staged a blockade of the Strip for eighteen months which has restricted the provision of food, medical supplies, water, oil, and other commodities. Much of the area has been without electricity for several months. The blockade has plunged Gaza into a depression.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child said in a statement that the pledges 193 states have made to protect the lives and development of children “have been blatantly violated during this crisis.”

Hundreds of youngsters have been killed or wounded and the continuous fighting is harming the health, education and family lives of those living through the conflict.

“The emotional and psychological effects of these events on an entire generation of children will be severe,” the committee stressed.

It emphasised that all signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including Israel, are obliged to condemn the targeting of children and direct attacks on places they use such as schools and hospitals.

“This affirmation is undermined by the fact that many children have lost their lives as a result of manifest disrespect for their protection and that of their schools, including some administered by the UN itself.”

A major incident under investigation is the bombing of a UN-run school which killed 43 people, most of them children who had been directed to the school for shelter. The Israeli army claimed it was responding to rocket fire coming from within the school grounds. The army produced footage to validate its claims after the UN denied there were militants operating within the school compound. The Israeli army, when challenged, admitted the footage was fifteen months old and in that case the school had been evacuated before being taken over by militants.

In another serious case the Israeli army is accused of rounding up around 400 people and designating a school for them to take shelter. They were warned not to move from the building. A day later the building was bombed by Israeli warplanes and scores were killed or wounded.

There is similar serious concern over the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas into civilian areas in southern Israel. Three civilians have been killed by the attacks since December 27.

Amnesty International has urged all parties to the conflict, as well as the international community, to ensure a “thorough, independent and impartial investigation” is established without delay into abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, and to ensure “full accountability.”

“These include Israeli attacks that have been directed at civilians or civilian buildings in the Gaza Strip, or which are disproportionate, and Palestinian armed groups’ indiscriminate rocket attacks into civilian population centres in southern Israel,” an Amnesty statement released this week said.

“Where appropriate, states must be ready to initiate criminal investigations and carry out prosecutions before their own courts if the evidence warrants it.”

“The Israeli army’s attacks are often disproportionate and have killed hundreds of unarmed civilians,” said the Amnesty statement. “Attacks are also directed at civilians and civilian buildings.”

“Most of the civilian population in Gaza has no access to the humanitarian aid on which they depend,” said Amnesty. “They have nowhere to go for safety, while hospitals are overstretched and lacking basic necessities.”

“Meanwhile, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups persist in firing indiscriminate rockets into Israel.”

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