

Israel on Trial for its Crimes Against Palestinians: Testimonies of Atrocities in Gaza From The Russell Tribunal

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The Russell Tribunal on Palestine convened an emergency session in Brussels last month to examine whether Israel committed war crimes in the besieged Gaza Strip during “Operation Protective Edge,” the summertime military assault that killed more than 2,100 Palestinians, including more than 500 children, and left Gaza in ruins.

After [hearing testimony from](#) journalists, eyewitnesses, legal scholars and physicians present during the onslaught, the [12-member jury](#), made up of world-renowned intellectuals and international law experts, found Israel [guilty](#) of “war crimes, crimes against humanity, crimes of murder, extermination and persecution and also incitement to genocide.”

Though it was virtually ignored by both mainstream and progressive media outlets, the tribunal was significant in that it did what the so-called international community has time and again refused to do. The Russell Tribunal put Israel on trial for its crimes against Palestinians.

Incitement to Genocide

Journalist [David Sheen](#) delivered a horrifying presentation on incitement to genocide within Israeli society, which was consumed by genocidal rhetoric from [top Israeli government officials](#) to the lynch mobs barreling down the streets of Jerusalem shouting “[death to Arabs](#).”

Sheen’s testimony stunned the jury, which concluded that absent outside intervention and accountability, the potential for genocide is likely.

“In light of the clear escalation in the physical and rhetorical violence deployed in respect of Gaza in the summer of 2014, the tribunal emphasizes the obligation of all states parties to the 1948 Genocide Convention ‘to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide,’ [the judges implored](#) in their final ruling.

“It is recognized that in a situation where patterns of crimes against humanity are perpetrated with impunity, and where direct and public incitement to genocide is manifest

throughout society, it is very conceivable that individuals or the state may choose to exploit the conditions in order to perpetrate the crime of genocide,” they warned, adding, “We [sic] have a genuine fear that in an environment of impunity and an absence of sanction for serious and repeated criminality, the lessons from Rwanda and other mass atrocities may once again go unheeded.”

Grisly executions

Journalist [Max Blumenthal](#) delivered powerful testimony on evidence of war crimes he gathered while in Gaza following a five-day ceasefire in mid-August.

Blumenthal described in vivid detail the grisly executions he documented of civilians, paramedics and fighters carried out by invading Israeli soldiers. He also highlighted several instances of Israeli soldiers summarily executing older men in Gaza after learning they spoke Hebrew, leading to speculation that soldiers were ordered to eliminate anyone capable of understanding their commands.

Blumenthal posted a transcript of his testimony [here](#).

Kidnappings and human shields

Gaza-based journalist [Mohammed Omer](#) described to the jury the crimes he witnessed and reported on in Gaza as well as the hardships of daily life under siege (see video of his testimony at the top of this post). He cited summary executions, kidnappings of Palestinian men at gunpoint and the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields by invading Israeli soldiers in the now obliterated farming community of [Khuzaa](#).

Omer was the only Palestinian eyewitness that made it out of Gaza to attend the session.

Raji Sourani, director of the [Palestinian Centre for Human Rights](#), and filmmaker Ashraf Mashharawi were scheduled to testify but the Egyptian military regime [prevented them from leaving](#) through the [Rafah crossing](#).

Deliberate and systematic

Renowned Norwegian doctor [Mads Gilbert](#) presented the jury with descriptions and photos of the gruesome injuries he witnessed while working at the overwhelmed [al-Shifa Hospital](#) in Gaza City at the peak of Israel’s latest bombing campaign, which marked the fourth time since 2006 that Gilbert has operated in Gaza during an Israeli military attack.

Outlining the devastation inflicted on Gaza’s health sector, Gilbert emphasized his admiration for the medical workers who risk their lives repairing the bodily damage caused by Israel’s “deliberate, systematic attack on the Palestinian civilian society.”

Taken together, the testimonies presented at the Russell Tribunal (all of which can be

viewed [here](#)) demonstrate a clear pattern of intentional destruction of Gaza and its people by an increasingly extreme settler-colonial state “primed for genocide,” as Max Blumenthal put it.

Genocide does not happen overnight or in a vacuum. There are warning signs, many of which were raised at the Russell Tribunal.

Israel has been destroying and erasing Palestine for over six decades in an effort to consolidate and maintain a demographically engineered Jewish majority in an area that is historically Palestinian.

As long as countries including the United States continue to unconditionally shower Israel with weapons while shielding its leaders from accountability on the international stage, Israel’s destruction of Palestine will not only continue, it will intensify. So the question becomes, how bad do the atrocities need to get before the world puts a stop this madness?

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