

The New York Times' Lies and Distortions Strengthens Israeli Impunity and Undermine Human Rights Workers in Gaza

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On 5 August, *The New York Times* published an article by its Jerusalem bureau chief [Jodi Rudoren](#) headlined "[Civilian or Not? New Fight in Tallying the Dead From the Gaza Conflict.](#)"

In discussing the statistics of casualties, Rudoren brings into question the data produced by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights' work and undermines our credibility through errors of fact and misrepresentations.

Al Mezan is an internationally recognized human rights organization that monitored attacks on the Palestinian population of Gaza during Israel's latest military operation. Distorting our credibility undermines our work with possible repercussions for the thousands of victims that we represent. Rudoren's conjectures serve to perpetuate the public relations message by Israel that there is no proof as to direct and disproportionate attacks on Palestinian civilians by Israeli forces. Our work shows that there is.

Uncorrected claim

The first error lies in a statement that we were correcting previous news releases at the time of the *Times'* interview, which implies that we issue false information and then update it later. The *Times* issued a correction to this false claim.

Secondly, and left uncorrected, is the claim that included in the list of Palestinian fatalities by Israeli forces are deaths from natural causes and domestic violence. The point was not directly attributed to Al Mezan in the article but to human rights groups. As the most quoted source and the only one in the relevant context, the connection to Al Mezan is assumed. The link is not at all tenuous in Rudoren's [tweets](#), where she directly named Al Mezan as the source.



The eastern Gaza City neighborhood of Shujaiya, destroyed by Israeli bombing and shelling, photographed on 16 August. ([Ashraf Amra](#) / [APA images](#))

Rudoren insisted that Mr. Samir Zaqout, Al Mezan’s monitoring director, made this statement and she refused to correct the error in the article or on her Twitter account. Only when a *Times* colleague, who was present in the interview, confirmed that Zaqout did not make the statement did she [agree to correct her tweet](#), five days after the error was made. Rudoren and *The New York Times* have refused to correct it in the article.

Severe distortion

Thirdly, and viewed as both a misguided perspective and a factual error, is Rudoren’s conjecture that some combatants have been mislabelled as civilians. The article provides inaccurate definitions of combatant and civilian, which severely distorts for readers the rights of those killed and the responsibilities of the government of Israel.

She categorized hundreds of victims aged between 15 and 17 as adults, in contravention with one of the most established international standards in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that persons under the age of 18 are children. Such reckless statements are not evidenced and endanger the legal standing of civilian victims.

The documentation of violations reported by Al Mezan is up to internationally recognized legal standards. Fatalities caused by Israeli forces would only be categorized as such after Al Mezan’s trained field workers visited the site of the attack and collected evidence and testimonies. Further, Al Mezan has a standard procedure for dealing with suspicious cases, involving a thorough site assessment and cross checking of information. No suspicious cases are added to the list until the suspicion has been removed to the satisfaction of our rules.

Rudoren deemed “impressive” the work of an Israeli group that gathered its information

indirectly and without interviewing any witnesses. The group also analyzed only 152 of the then-1,800 victims.

Reality

When Al Mezan contacted Rudoren, she refused to correct the second factual error in the article, which was one of a number of errors and misinterpretations on the situation in Gaza that will lead to misunderstandings for any reader without a window into the reality of the situation on the ground.

Serious journalists would bridge the gap between events on the ground and concerned citizens around the world. Rudoren completely failed to do so. Given the limited coverage of Israel's then one-month-long attack on the Gaza Strip by the *Times* and the many unsubstantiated claims relayed by Israeli and international media, we consider the interview between Rudoren and Zaqout to be a lost opportunity.

Working in Gaza, Al Mezan and other distinguished human rights organizations are at the receiving end of Israeli attacks. On the ground, and following thorough investigations, evidence had been collected that Israel violated the basic rules of international law in hundreds of armed attacks.

In particular, the failure to distinguish between military and civilian targets is exemplified in over 850 attacks on houses, many of which were populated, and other attacks on well-marked hospitals, ambulances and water and power facilities. Other crimes were committed when the Israeli army failed in hundreds of cases to launch proportionate attacks on alleged military targets. The onus is on Israel, not on the victims, to prove that its attacks were both on military targets and proportionate.

Israel's latest operation is one in a series of severe violations of international law, which amount to war crimes. Israel's repeat violations are driven by a lack of accountability. Our work aims to hold perpetrators to account and achieve justice and reparations for victims as per international law. Undermining our work will strengthen the culture of impunity and encourage a lack of accountability, creating an atmosphere supportive of the next war, not peace.

*For more information about **Al Mezan Center for Human Rights**, visit mezan.org.*

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