

## Tutu calls for end to blockade of Gaza

By [Global Research](#)

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Situation is abominable, says Nobel laureate  
'Culture of impunity' on both sides of conflict



Desmond Tutu. Photograph: Roberto Schmidt/AFP/Getty Images

Desmond Tutu, the South African Nobel laureate, called for an end to the “abominable” Israeli blockade of Gaza yesterday and condemned a “culture of impunity” on both sides of the conflict.

Tutu was in Gaza on a three-day mission, sent by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate the deaths of 18 Palestinians from a single family, who were killed by a wave of Israeli artillery shells in Beit Hanoun in November 2006. Tutu said he was in a “state of shock” after seeing Gaza and taking detailed witness testimony from survivors of the incident.

“We saw a forlorn, deserted, desolate and eerie place,” he said. “The entire situation is abominable. We believe that ordinary Israeli citizens would not support this blockade, this siege, if they knew what it really meant to ordinary people like themselves.” The international community was also at fault, he said, for its “silence and complicity”.

Tutu said he and his team had wanted to travel to Israel as well, to hear the Israeli account of what happened and to visit the town of Sderot, which is the frequent target of rocket attacks from militants in Gaza. However, in the past 18 months since the deaths in Beit

Hanoun Israel has not granted Tutu a visa. He reached Gaza this week by making a rare crossing from Egypt.

The archbishop and anti-apartheid campaigner said peace between Israel and the Palestinians would only come with accountability for incidents like the Beit Hanoun shelling, and with dialogue between the warring parties.

“There can be no justice, no peace, no stability, not for Israel, not for the Palestinians, without accountability for human rights violations,” he said. “Israel has admitted it made a mistake but this falls far short of accountability and due redress for victims and their families.”

Israel’s military has said the shelling in Beit Hanoun was mistaken and was the result of a “rare and severe failure in the artillery fire control system” which created “incorrect range-finders”. It said no legal action would be taken against any officer.

However, it is not clear why the artillery weapon was targeted so close to a residential district of Beit Hanoun, nor why shells continued to be fired after the first one hit the house. At least six shells were fired in the space of a few minutes that morning, though some witnesses told Tutu’s team that as many as 15 were fired.

Christine Chinkin, professor of international law at the London School of Economics, who travelled with Tutu in his team, said it was her preliminary assessment that the incident was still a breach of international law.

“Firing in a way that cannot distinguish between civilians and combatants is clearly a violation of international humanitarian law,” she said. “I don’t think that the idea of a technical mistake takes away from the initial responsibility of the action of firing where civilian casualties are clearly foreseeable ... it has to be foreseeable when you give yourself such a small margin that any error has the potential to lead to civilian casualties.”

Tutu met with the former Palestinian prime minister Ismail Haniyeh on Tuesday and told him that, while he was opposed to the Israeli occupation, he condemned the rocket fire by militants into Gaza. Tutu said there should be more dialogue with Hamas.

“True security, peace, will not come from the barrel of a gun,” he said. “It will come through negotiation; negotiation not with your friends, peace can come only when enemies sit down and talk. It happened in South Africa. It has happened more recently in Northern Ireland. It will happen here too.”

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