



AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

RAFAH DAILY UPDATE (Volume 5)

Issued at 3:00pm on Thursday 20 May 2004



In view of the serious escalation of violations by the IOF in the southern town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights has undertaken to provide a daily update of the situation in the form of this bulletin. This document is based on information collected by Al Mezan's fieldworkers in Rafah as well as statements and releases made by the local and international press. By publishing this update, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights demands an immediate intervention by the International Community to stop the Israeli war crimes and to provide protection for Palestinian civilians, which constitute legal and moral obligations under International Law.



Background:

Rafah is located on the Mediterranean coast south of the Gaza Strip. Egypt borders Rafah in the south, Khan Yunis in the north, the green line, which separates the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 from those occupied in 1948, in the east and the Mediterranean in the west.

There are ten areas in Rafah: al-Mawasi, Tel as-Sultan, the Refugee Camp, Western Rafah, al-Hashash area, an-Nakhla (Al-Brazil), Khirbit al-Adas, as-Salam area, al-Jnina area and al-Bayuk. The Rafah population reached 145.218 people in 1997.

Thursday 20 May 2004

- The operation carried out by the Israeli occupation forces (IOF) in Rafah continued throughout last night and today. IOF announced today the expansion of the so-called "Operation Rainbow", which started in the early morning hours of Tuesday, to the Al Brazil and As-Salam neighborhoods southeast of the town. This has been confirmed by reports from Palestinian sources of Israeli tanks entering these neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the siege of Tel Al Sultan neighborhood continued and is causing severe humanitarian implications due to the destruction by the IOF of the water network making water supply impossible. IOF also raided two areas of the city, killing 5 Palestinians. This brings the death toll in the town to 37 since the beginning of the IOF operation in the town. The movement of ambulance services is still obstructed. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights has also documented more cases of bulldozing of streets and numerous cases of destruction and damage of houses in Tel Al Sultan and Al Brazil neighborhoods.
- Tel Al Sultan residents have reported that Israeli bulldozers are razing the streets since the beginning of their incursion into the area. Remains of water and sewage lines can be seen everywhere. At the same time, the water supply has been cut off for the third consecutive day, while the municipal water services are unable to reach the area to fix them. The Head of the Water Section of Rafah Municipality has confirmed that as municipal officials arrived on the location of one of the water wells to repair it, the IOF targeted their vehicle and shot at the driver. He added that, in any case, operating the water wells would not supply houses in Rafah with water, as all the necessary networks have been destroyed. As a result the only solution to supply residents of Tel Al Sultan with water is through mobile reservoirs, on condition that this is permitted by the IOF.
- Al Mezan's fieldworker reported that ten Israeli tanks and three bulldozers stormed the eastern part of Rafah, moving through the Salah Ad-Din Street at 10 pm on Wednesday, May 10, 2004. He also reported that Israeli helicopters fired several missiles on the area. Numerous other tanks and armored vehicles joined them and entered the As-Salam neighborhood and the nearby Brazil neighborhood. At 1:30 am helicopter gunship fired a missile at Al Brazil, killing three Palestinians and wounding two. Ambulances managed to reach



the victims' location using dirt roads but could collect only one person before IOF fired at them. It took them until 3 am to collect the others. The names of those who were killed are: Yousif Mahmud Al Mghari, aged 21, Hamid Yasin Bahlul, aged 18, and Mahmud Fathi Dieb, aged 22.

- At 5:50 am, Palestinian ambulances managed to collect two bodies near the Brazil area. Mezan's fieldworker in Rafah reported that they died from a missile fired by a helicopter earlier in the same area. The names of the two are: Mahmud Najeeb Al Akhras, aged 18, and Mahmud Wail Abu Jazar, aged 18.
- The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution UNSC 1544 (2004), in which it calls upon Israel to stop demolition of Palestinian homes. Fourteen states voted in favor while the US abstained. The Security Council called on Israel to 'respect its obligations under international humanitarian law, particularly the obligation not to undertake home demolitions contrary to that law'. The Council also expressed grave concern regarding the humanitarian situation of Palestinians made homeless in the Rafah area. full text of the Resolution can be reached at:

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/UNID/83C20B74077DD08F49256E9A000E8D24?OpenDocument>

- Al Mezan issued an urgent appeal on the lack of water and other humanitarian supplies in the Tel Al Sultan neighborhood today. In its statement, the Center said that the humanitarian situation has reached a serious point with people under house arrest without water supply or child's milk for three days. It also affirmed IOF's deliberate destruction of water networks in the area.
- A mother gave birth to her baby "on air" in the neighborhood under the siege. A Palestinian woman from Tel Al Sultan neighborhood called a local radio station and told them her sister was giving birth to her baby. She said Israeli tanks were near the house and soldiers shot at anything that moved. Ambulances had been sent back by IOF and could not reach the house. The radio station put her in contact with Dr. Baha' Al Ghalayini, who gave her step-by-step instructions on the air. The baby is said to be in a good condition.
- Following two helicopter raids on Brazil neighborhood and the arrival of IOF tanks in the area, Al Mezan's fieldworker reported the demolition of tens of homes in the area. Eyewitnesses reported that the demolished homes belonged to civilians who never took part of any hostilities. One of the homes is owned by Hassan Awwad, who lives with his mother five sisters. In her statement, Hassan's sister, told Al Mezan the walls of her home suddenly started to collapse at approximately 8 am Thursday 20 May 2004. She tried to open the house's door and leave with her old mother and aunt, but the door was closed by the rubble of the opposite house, which was being destroyed



by bulldozers. The women had to climb a wooden ladder to reach the next door house. After 30 minutes, the neighbors' home started to shake. The two families tried to leave it and, again, the door was closed from rubble. They managed to dig holes in a wall and leave the house and took refuge in another neighbors' house.

- In a press release issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Committee said that "civilian life must be respected under International Humanitarian Law". The release continued to say that ICRC "condemns deliberate attacks against civilians who do not take directly part in hostilities. Such attacks are prohibited in all circumstances ICRC's concerns in this regard are all the greater as current IDF operations take place in highly populated areas." ICRC demanded that Israel "takes all necessary precautions to spare civilian life and property, to ensure that the wounded have access to adequate medical facilities, and that medical personnel and vehicles and facilities can function unhampered." ICRC urged Israel to respect its obligations under International Humanitarian Law.
- On 19 May, 2004, the Special Rapporteur on Occupied Territories, Mr. John Dugard, issued a press release and said he was "horrified at Israeli action in Gaza". The statement said he "wishes to add his voice to those who have expressed their horror and concern about Israeli military action in Gaza and in particular in Rafah," and that the Israeli acts are "carried out unlawfully and wantonly" contrary to Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which ranks such actions as "war crimes". Full text of his statement is available at: www.unhchr.ch
- Israeli left-wing activists demonstrated in several Israeli cities to protest about the IOF attack on the Rafah march, in which eight Palestinian protestors were killed from tank shelling. Many Israeli parliamentarians and politicians criticized IOF for this operation. A member of Knesset (MK) of Meretz Party said that the Israeli Army had lost its mind and that the orders of firing civilians were illegal. Muhammad Baraka, an Arab MK said that the Israeli army was perpetrating massacres in Rafah and called for international intervention. The IOF operation in Rafah is generating mounting international condemnation and accuses of Israel having committed war crimes.
- Residents Brazil neighborhood, which is currently under Israeli siege, reported that IOF tanks have passed through narrow roads inside the neighborhood with a huge military bulldozer. The bulldozer destroyed hundreds of walls and concrete columns supporting houses to open the road for the tanks.
- In his affidavit to Al Mezan, 42-year-old Saeed Hassan said that at 8am today IOF ordered him to leave his house with his family. Hassan, his wife and their three children left the house with white flags in their hands, as soldiers ordered them through loudspeakers. Once they were in the street, a tank



opened fire at them injuring the five of them. Hassan managed to go back into the house and call an ambulance. At 8:45 the ambulance arrived near Abu Bakr Mosque in the area, where it was stopped by a tank. An IOF bulldozer erected sand barriers both in front and behind the ambulance. It kept adding sand until more than half of the ambulance was buried. The ambulance driver remains stuck inside until this moment and has reported this information to Al Mezan by phone.

- Humanitarian sources in the Gaza Strip reported that they are not able to find aid materials, especially children's milk. The only commercial crossing used to import and export goods, Karni, has been closed since May 11, 2004.
- Al Mezan has received dozens of pleas from residents of Rafah. People asked for medical assistance, medicine, children food and to be evacuated from their demolished houses. The latest call came from the family of Abdul Fattah Azzam, who was inside the house as bulldozers were proceeding to its demolition.
- Reports have come in that IOF arrested Hassan Abu Armaneh, his wife and their ten children and took them in an armored vehicle to the military "no mans land" of the Rafah-Egypt border where they were left on the spot without instructions or necessary papers. Al Mezan contacted Physicians for Human rights, Israel with this case.
- Jamal Al Assar was killed, and Imad Al Assar and others were injured from IOF live bullets in their home in Tel Al Sultan neighborhood. They called the hospital and radio stations for assistance, but the IOF prohibited ambulances from collecting them. Al Mezan and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel contacted the Israeli army, but no developments have been reported until now.
- In an affidavit given to Al Mezan, ambulance driver, Ali Abdullah Abu Amra aged 35, said that an Israeli tank opened fire at the ambulance while it was waiting to take a doctor to help injured Palestinians. He said that the tank showed up suddenly at Saddam Street in Al Jneneh neighborhood in Rafah and fired at the ambulance, a Toyota carrying number plate (7329), and with a clear red siren and signs. Abu Amra said he hardly managed to leave the ambulance and that the tank continued firing at it. The mission to collect the wounded failed.