

## **Presseerklärung amnesty international 09.12.2014**

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### **Israel's destruction of multistorey buildings: extensive, wanton and unjustified**



Palestinians gather around the remains of a commercial center, which witnesses said was hit by an Israeli air strike, in Rafah, 2014.

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Air strikes on landmark buildings at the tail end of the Israeli military's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in August 2014 were a deliberate and direct attack on civilian buildings and amount to war crimes, says Amnesty International today.

["Nothing is immune": Israel's destruction of landmark buildings in Gaza](#) provides evidence that attacks on four multistorey buildings during the last four days of the conflict were in contravention of international humanitarian law and calls for them to be independently and impartially investigated.

"All the evidence we have shows this large-scale destruction was carried out deliberately and with no military justification," said Philip Luther, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

"Both the facts on the ground and statements made by Israeli military spokespeople at the time indicate that the attacks were a collective punishment against the people of Gaza and were designed to destroy their already precarious livelihoods."

While the Israeli military warned the residents of the buildings to leave before they destroyed them, scores of people from nearby buildings were injured and hundreds of people were devastated to lose their homes, businesses and belongings.

In all four cases, panicked residents hurried to evacuate the buildings and in most cases, were unable to salvage their belongings, including important documents, jewellery and savings.

The Municipal Commercial Centre in Rafah, which contained a shopping mall, a garage, several offices and a medical clinic, was reduced to a tangled skeleton of iron girders and concrete. Businesses in this building provided the livelihoods for hundreds of families, who are now struggling to make ends meet.

Other than the suggestion that one of the destroyed buildings housed a Hamas command centre and of "facilities linked to Palestinian militants" in another, the Israeli authorities have provided no information as to why they levelled four entire buildings.

"Even if the Israeli authorities had good reason to believe that a part of a building was being used for military purposes, they had an obligation to choose means and methods of attack that would minimize harm to civilians and their property," says Philip Luther. "The Israeli army have previously conducted air strikes on specific apartments in high-rise buildings without their complete destruction."

Amnesty International sent its findings about the air strikes to the Israeli authorities and asked for explanations on why each of the attacks was carried out; what or who was being targeted; what precautions were taken to minimize the risk of harm to civilians; and whether any investigation had taken place or was ongoing.

A response was received from the State Comptroller, an ombudsman role, who simply described the focus of his inquiry into Operation Protective Edge. No one from the authorities who could have actually addressed the questions about these attacks responded.

Amnesty International has documented and consistently condemned violations of international humanitarian law committed by both Israel and Hamas and Palestinian armed groups during the conflict. While this report and another one issued in November, [Families](#)

[\*under the rubble: Israeli attacks on inhabited homes\*](#), have examined Israeli attacks, a forthcoming output, currently being prepared, will focus on violations by Hamas.

Up until now any investigations of alleged violations of international law by either Israeli or Palestinian forces in conflicts in the Gaza Strip and Israel have failed to be independent, thorough or impartial.

Amnesty International is calling for the Commission of Inquiry set up the United Nations to be allowed to conduct its investigation without hindrance and for the Israeli authorities to lift their block on Amnesty International and other human rights organizations entering Gaza.

“War crimes must be independently and impartially investigated and those responsible should be brought to justice in fair trials. Those whose homes and livelihoods have been unlawfully destroyed deserve justice and full reparation,” said Philip Luther.