



INCREASED PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

26 September 2024

Critical Action Is Needed **Now**

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has reached unprecedented levels with catastrophic consequences for civilians. Since 7 October 2023, the hostilities have caused extensive loss of life, widespread destruction of homes, and severe damage to vital infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and utilities. **Civilians, especially women, children, and older persons, as well as persons with disabilities and persons with illnesses** are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the violence, with many losing their homes, loved ones, and access to basic services.

The war has compounded an already dire situation in Gaza, where years of blockade and recurring cycles of conflict have severely constrained access to food, medical supplies, and essential services.

Hospitals are destroyed, and healthcare facilities are struggling to provide critical care to the thousands of injured. The destruction of power and water systems has left large parts of the population without access to clean water and sanitation, increasing the risk of spread of disease.

Israel's attacks on Gaza, and repeated "evacuation orders" lead to displacement at an alarming rate, with hundreds of thousands of civilians forced to flee their homes. Many are seeking refuge in overcrowded "shelters", which themselves have been subject to attacks. The lack of safe corridors and the ongoing violence have hindered humanitarian efforts to deliver life-saving aid, leaving people in desperate need of food, water, and medical assistance.

In addition, thousands of Palestinians have been arbitrarily detained, often held in secret, incommunicado detention, with consistent reports of ill-treatment and torture at the hands of Israeli security forces.

"I urge all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, lay down their arms. Stop the killing once and for all."

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk

Israel's restrictions on the entry of food, water, medicine, electricity and fuel, and continuing forms of siege imposed on Gaza have created a dire humanitarian situation in which Palestinians are dying of disease and hunger. Many people are suffering from acute food insecurity.

The UN Human Rights Office has repeatedly urged the Israeli forces to avoid targeting civilians and civilian objects, [including healthcare facilities and personnel](#), and in any event to [minimize loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects](#).

In the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, Israel has increased its use of airstrikes, attack helicopters, anti-tank missiles, shoulder-fired explosive projectiles and other weapons of war, resulting in destruction of civilian infrastructure, displacement, and the killing and injuries of hundreds of Palestinians, including children.

Across the West Bank, Palestinians are being driven from their homes and land, due to multiple coercive factors, including demolitions of property, settler violence, systematic discrimination, debilitating movement restrictions and Israeli forces arrests and often violent operations, which risks [seriously deepening the already catastrophic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#).

Following 7 October 2023, Israeli authorities distributed thousands of weapons to civilians and drafted around 5,000 settlers into regional defense battalions. This led to a significant rise in violence by armed settlers and soldiers, including against children, with the distinction between state and settler violence further blurred during this period.

Furthermore, free expression and civic space are under unprecedented pressure, with legitimate forms of speech and criticism being met with heavy retaliation by Israeli forces.

[The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also continually called for an end to the suffering and urged all parties to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law](#). The UN Human Rights OPT Office however continues to document serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law by Palestinian armed groups and the Israeli military, including possible war crimes and other atrocity crimes.

Key Facts & Figures

Gaza

- ▶ The attacks by Palestinian armed groups on 7 October 2023 resulted in the killings of at least 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals,¹ with reports of torture and sexual violence. Over 230 hostages were taken into Gaza, 101 are still held there, while at least 35 hostages have reportedly been killed. Israel's subsequent assault on Gaza, has led to the deaths of 41,495² Palestinians, which is greater than all previous escalations of hostilities in Gaza combined.
- ▶ On average, about 130 people have been killed every day in Gaza and *most of the dead are women and children*.
- ▶ Over 96,000 Palestinians have been injured, many permanently.
- ▶ 495,000³ people are already starving at the "Catastrophe" IPC five category.
- ▶ 1.9 million Palestinians are displaced and uprooted from their homes - many multiple times.
- ▶ At least 17,000 children are orphaned or separated from their families.
- ▶ Only 11 out of 36 hospitals remain partially functional and strikes have killed more than 885 health and medical workers, impacted hospitals and destroyed ambulances.
- ▶ Over 85% of school buildings have been damaged or destroyed and 625,000 children have lost a full year of education.
- ▶ Gender-based violence including cases of sexual abuse in shelters and host communities with intensifying protection and health risks particularly for girls, due to a lack of private, safe, and sanitary bathing and latrine facilities.
- ▶ Increase in violence against children within their families and communities, and of children being driven into child labour, including high-risk activities such as foraging for scrap metal, bringing children into contact with explosive remnants of war.

West Bank Including East Jerusalem

- ▶ In the West Bank, 692 Palestinians were killed,⁴ including 161 children (157 boys and four girls), nine women and at least five persons with a disability, the highest levels since UN records began in 2005.
- ▶ Over 1,510 Palestinians, including 627 children, have been displaced from at least 39 herding communities in Area C, and over 1,000 Palestinians have been displaced following Israeli forces operations in Jenin.
- ▶ Between 7 October 2023 and 1 September 2024, OCHA recorded over 1,270 attacks by Israeli forces.
- ▶ Israeli authorities demolished, confiscated, or forced the demolition of 1,697 Palestinian structures across the West Bank, displacing more than 4,400 Palestinians, including about 1,850 children.
- ▶ According to the Jenin municipality, 70% of road networks have been destroyed, severely affecting the underlying infrastructure for water, sewage, and internet services.



¹ According to the Israeli Ministry of Defense

² According to Gaza's Health Ministry (as of 25 September 2024)

³ According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification

⁴ Of the verified fatalities, Israeli security forces killed at least 673 Palestinians, settlers killed 11 Palestinians, and 8 Palestinians were killed either by Israeli security forces or settlers (figures verified by UN Human Rights OPT Office)



Our Response

The high civilian casualties and injuries, mass displacement, destruction of infrastructure, the imposition of a siege, mass arrests, accelerated settlement expansion, and the prolonged emergency has already resulted in a human rights and humanitarian crisis of enormous magnitude.

In response, the UN Human Rights OPT Office has amplified its human rights monitoring and humanitarian protection work, including repurposing human resources and operational capacity, deploying teams into Gaza and across the West Bank, and onboarding additional staff with expertise in Women's Rights and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Information Management, Communications, Security Coordination, and Military Expertise.

Protection Cluster Emergency Operations Activated

As the lead agency of the Humanitarian Protection Cluster, the UN Human Rights OPT Office coordinates protection responses of about 100 inter-governmental organizations, national and UN partners across GBV, Child Protection, Mine Action, Housing Land and Property, monitoring and reporting, and advocacy.

To strengthen the humanitarian response, UN Human Rights OPT Office and its partners are putting in place protection measures including the training and deployment of **Emergency Protection Responders (EPRs), available on rotation 24/7** for any new assignment with the Protection Cluster targeting internally displaced populations severely

What Is Protection?

In humanitarian emergencies people become more vulnerable and are at risk of physical and psychological injury, abuse, violence and deprivation. In particular, some people are at greater risk including children, youth, elderly, women and girls, pregnant women and those with disabilities or chronic illness. Humanitarian protection are activities designed to prevent or minimize people's exposure to risks, mitigate/respond to the needs of those who have been exposed and to uphold human rights in accordance with international law. Protection is central to humanitarian response.

affected by the ongoing escalations within Gaza and deprived of dignified and safe services either in their primary residential areas or in new areas of displacement.

In parallel, the Protection Cluster is working with partners to re-establish light versions of protection specialized services and referral pathways (case management, GBV response, psycho-social support services), family reunification, registration and alternative care, material assistance (assistive devices, dignity kits), explosive ordnance risk education and risk assessments.

When the situation allows, **the Office aims to create two presences in Southern Gaza and Middle/North Gaza to coordinate and deliver these protection services.**

The Protection Cluster in Gaza initiated ongoing training for Emergency Protection Responders in July and August 2024, to collect data on urgent needs, provide information about available services, and make necessary referrals for critical protection cases. Over 120 responders have completed their training and are active on the ground, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the protection context and needs in Gaza. The Protection Monitoring System depends on the network of trained emergency protection responders.



Um Abdullah, who runs a Culture & Free Thought Association shelter, greets a Protection Cluster team member in Khan Younis, Gaza. ©Olga Cherevko OHCHR

The EPRs model is also being rolled out in the West Bank for communities under siege of Israeli military style operations, mass arbitrary detention, unprecedented levels of settler violence and with significant risk of forcible transfer and displacement.

Delivering Emergency Protection Responses, to Children, Women, Vulnerable Groups & Others

The crisis has profoundly impacted protection cluster partners on the ground. National NGOs in the OPT have always been and will remain the backbone of protection responses. However, these are the very same people who are being injured, displaced, separated, traumatized and are grieving their loved ones. Communication with partners is unreliable at best and non-existent in some cases. The UN Human Rights OPT Office is still working closely with partners on the ground to adapt to the rapidly changing and hostile environment, to deliver a coordinated protection response of critical services.

Scale up protection cluster work to support the protection cluster on the ground:

- Integration of protection responses across all sectors, through the EPRs model creating a pool of protection professionals and frontline inter-sectoral humanitarian workers to provide coordinated, time-critical, lifesaving and general protection support for affected communities.

- Ensuring coherent and targeted responses across child protection, gender-based violence, mine action, legal aid and cross-cutting approaches, including provision of material as well as cash-for-protection assistance to address critical needs.
- Strengthening integration of protection in all humanitarian sectors, to ensure vulnerable population groups, including persons with disabilities, and those at risk of abuse are prioritized across the emergency response.
- Community response mechanisms and support to community-led initiatives. Risk mitigation measures to avoid further harm to families, vulnerable groups and children, during primary response and distribution, as well as explosive ordnance risk education, and GBV risk mitigation.
- Monitoring, reporting and advocacy on violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law.

The scale of protection concerns and needs is unprecedented. New needs, vastly different in type and scale, will require new responses, and the roll-out of urgent, life-saving services accompanied by the establishment of new systems and coordination structures to ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind. The UN Human Rights OPT Office, along with partners, continues to strengthen its protection capacity and as space opens, there will be need to expand protection services and responses in various locations across the Gaza strip.



Data Lead for the UN

UN Human Rights Office OPT is responsible for the official compilation, verification and reporting of verified UN data on civilian fatalities. The Office serves a critical role in Gaza and the West Bank to monitor, document, and report on violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including conflict-related fatalities, to ensure accurate, reliable, and timely information and legal analysis is available aimed at guiding protection responses, preventing further violations, and ensuring accountability. The prompt monitoring work feeds directly into the overall contextual analysis of the crisis in the OPT and serves as early warning, guiding the Humanitarian Coordinator, the UN Humanitarian Country Team and through it, the UN leadership, and the UN system as a whole.

Despite extreme challenges on the ground, and the enormous scale of violations, the Office is scaling up its monitoring capacity, both in Gaza and the West Bank, to continue to fulfil its human rights monitoring and reporting mandate. The Office has documented hundreds of cases of alleged violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem. The Office provides statements and briefings, which contain strong factual and legal analysis of rapidly unfolding events, to Member States and top UN officials on the situation in the OPT.

Trusted Reliable Partner

Following a major Israeli military offensive in Gaza in late 2008/early 2009, the UN Human Rights Council requested the High Commissioner to strengthen the Office,

to engage in the monitoring of the human rights situation in the OPT, and to provide periodic public reports of the Office's findings to the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly. As such, the UN Human Rights OPT Office is the only international organization with a formal mandate to monitor and publicly report on the human rights situation in the OPT, and since then, the Office has acted as a reliable, impartial source of information for Member States, in their advocacy efforts with all duty-bearers, and for the international community more broadly. This function is particularly crucial to dispel any misinformation and disinformation, and to encourage addressing unfolding events through a human rights lens.

UN Human Rights continues to remain highly operational and engaged in the OPT and continues to monitor and operate across the territory to the full extent of its capacity and effectively communicates up-to-date findings. The crisis demonstrates the vital importance of UN Human Rights' objective monitoring and reporting in the OPT and leading the Humanitarian Protection Cluster.

As indicated above, when the situation allows, the Office aims to have at least two presences in Gaza - Rafah and Gaza City, and one in Northern West Bank. The Office will continue to scale up its role as lead of the Protection Cluster, vital to ensure protection services are mobilized across the OPT and that protection and respect for international human rights and international humanitarian law are an integral part of the work of the Humanitarian Country Team. The scale of the crisis and the operational challenges, including re-establishing UN Human Rights offices in Gaza, and expanding in the West Bank, the rotation of staff in and out of Gaza, increased logistical needs and the necessity for additional staff capacity, have all driven up the UN Human Rights OPT Office's budget.

The Office's priority is to secure the safety of its staff whilst remaining operational. The Office remains on the ground in the OPT, committed to stay and monitor and report on the situation and coordinate the Protection Cluster where access and security allow – a protection and human rights voice and focus need to be maintained.

When the situation allows, the UN Human Rights Office will also cooperate with development actors to coordinate foreseen support for national institutions and civil society focusing on human rights-based approaches to recovery; strengthen links and coordination mechanisms with other non-humanitarian actors, and thus reinforce collective humanitarian and development outcomes and advance the recovery process. In this regard UN Human Rights will inter alia build on the successes and experiences of human rights treaty implementation with the Palestinian government to ensure a human rights-based approach is applied in all recovery processes.

Aligned to Humanitarian Principles

UN Human Rights is committed to supporting all those affected, in accordance with the humanitarian principles:

Humanity by protecting and ensuring respect for rights holders.

Neutrality by adhering to the Office's mandate and always remaining neutral during the conflict.

Impartiality by providing support to those most in need during the conflict.

Independence by always working autonomously from political, economic, military or other objectives.



Head of OHCHR OPT office talks to students in a makeshift school about human rights, Rafah, Gaza, Jul 2024. ©OHCHR OPT



Contributions Will Result In:

Preventing violations and strengthening protection

- Enhanced prevention and protection of vulnerable groups.
- Specialized protection presence and scaled up protection operations for groups and individuals who are at very high risk.
- Human rights effectively integrated into humanitarian strategies, planning and emergency response.
- Strengthened capacities of organizations of persons with disabilities to provide needed services on the ground and ensure participation in the humanitarian response.

Strengthening the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations

- Objective monitoring and reporting of the human rights situation in the OPT.
- Provision of technical assistance to institutionalize human rights treaty reporting and follow-up to ensure accountability for human rights implementation.
- Promotion of a human rights-based recovery with a focus on the justice and security sectors, and rule of law.
- Provision of technical assistance to ensure that all support for the recovery process is anchored in Palestine's Human Rights Treaty obligations.

Enhancing participation and protection of civic space

- Support provided to rebuild civil society including the NHRI, as key players in the recovery, rebuilding and transitional process.
- Strengthened emphasis on protecting and expanding civic space with a focus on women's organizations and women human rights defenders.

To enable the Office to achieve these results with a committed evidence-based approach, UN Human Rights OPT Office will continue to be responsible for the official compilation, verification and reporting of verified UN data on civilian fatalities in Gaza and the West Bank and feed information on casualties across the UN Humanitarian Team.

Funding Needs

UN Human Rights is seeking **US\$ 14 million** for 2025 to continue and scale up its protection coordination, monitoring and reporting and legal work.

Partner With UN Human Rights And Be Part of the **Solution**

To get more information on the Office's work in the OPT, please contact:

Ajith Sunghay

Head of Office, UN Human Rights in OPT
e-mail: sunghay@un.org

Nils Clotteau

Chief, Donor and External Relations Section
e-mail: nils.clotteau@un.org

Making a difference
on the ground.

Realizing
human rights
for everyone,
everywhere,
NOW.

*OHCHR monitoring field visit to the Makhoul Bedouin community
in Jordan Valley, West Bank, Feb 2023. ©OHCHR OPT*



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER