



UK-based organisations welcome UN Commission of Inquiry report into Gaza protests, urge UK action (5 March 2019)

As a coalition of UK-based humanitarian, development, human rights and faith organisations working to support the rights and welfare of the Palestinian people, we welcome the short report¹ of the UN-mandated independent Commission of Inquiry into the 2018 protests in Gaza. It found “the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces against demonstrators was unlawful” in all the cases it investigated – all 189 fatalities and over 300 of the 23,000 injuries – with the possible exception of two incidents. We urge the UK government to consider the Commission’s findings, and to action specific accountability measures in accordance with the Commission’s recommendations.

The Commission was established by a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council in May 2018, [on which the UK abstained](#), following the use of force by Israel’s military forces on the large-scale civilian protests which began in Gaza on 30 March known as the “Great March of Return”.

The investigation found that 189 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces at the weekly demonstrations, 183 by live ammunition. It found that among the casualties were children, medical workers, journalists and persons with disabilities, all of whom are entitled to special protection under international law. The Commission found reasonable grounds to believe that medical workers, journalists, some children and some people with visible disabilities were shot intentionally.

The Commission found that more than 6,100 individuals were injured by live ammunition, many receiving catastrophic, life-changing injuries that over-stretched a Gaza health system already “deteriorated owing to the blockade”. The Commission notes, “More people lost limbs during the demonstrations than during the entire Israel-Gaza conflict of 2014”, and that, “Amputations and disabilities have placed a huge burden of care on individuals, families and communities, and disproportionately affected women, mothers, daughters and sisters.”

The Commission crucially confirmed the legal framework that should govern Israel’s policing and use of force at the protests is “that of law enforcement, based in international human rights law.” It concluded, “While not all demonstrators were peaceful, the commission found reasonable grounds to believe that the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces violated the rights of the thousands who were.” Critically it found “reasonable grounds to believe that some violations constitute international crimes”, including potential war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We urge the UK Government to carefully consider the Commission’s grave findings and appropriate recommendations in relation to preventing future violations at protests and protecting civilians, prompt access to healthcare for the injured, lifting the closure/blockade of Gaza, and accountability measures for violations committed. The necessity for all states to take action on accountability is underscored by the Commission’s finding that, “Israel has consistently failed to meaningfully investigate and prosecute commanders and soldiers for crimes and violations committed against Palestinians or to provide reparation to victims in accordance with international norms.”

The Commission’s investigation and report appear independent, impartial and thorough in line with international standards. The report is a vitally important document providing the basis for ensuring legal accountability and justice for the huge number of victims, survivors and their families of serious violations perpetrated by Israel’s forces at the civilian protests in Gaza, which are ongoing. The UK Government must now act in accordance with its crucial “support for international criminal justice as a fundamental part of the UK’s foreign policy”² by supporting the Commission’s report at the Human Rights Council in the week beginning 18 March 2019.

1 A longer version of the report will be published by the Commission shortly before 18 March.

2 [Statement on 'UK Support and Funding for International Criminal Justice'](#), Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, 17 July 2018

Statement endorsed by the following 10 organisations:

ABCD Bethlehem

CAFOD

Christian Aid

Council of Arab British Understanding

Friends of Nablus and Surrounding Areas

Interpal

Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights

Medical Aid for Palestinians

War on Want

Welfare Association