

Israeli security forces' response to Gaza protests 'a recipe for more bloodshed', says UN expert

Since the beginning of the year, Israeli security forces have responded to protests along Gaza's border fence with tear gas, rubber coated bullets and live ammunition that have caused death, injury and fear, which the UN's independent human rights expert on the region described on Tuesday as "a recipe for more bloodshed".

[Michael Lynk](#), the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, [said in a statement](#) that on 8 February live ammunition killed boys aged 14 and 17 during a protest.

Just four days later, a 16-year-old boy was hit in the head by a tear gas canister: "According to human rights organisations, the three boys posed no threat to Israeli forces", the statement added.

And on 22 February, another 14-year-old boy was killed by live ammunition during a protest east of Gaza city.

"We must ensure legal accountability and end impunity for the excessive use of force against largely peaceful Palestinian demonstrators, and the resulting arbitrary deprivation of life," said the Special Rapporteur. "This is a grave violation of their right to life and it abrogates their guaranteed freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association."

Mr. Lynk welcomed the [findings](#) and recommendations on [28 February](#) of the [Commission of Inquiry](#), mandated by the [Human Rights Council](#) last May, to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

"It found reasonable grounds to believe that, in all but two of the 189 fatalities investigated, the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces against demonstrators was unlawful," Mr. Lynk asserted, adding his support to the Commission's call for accountability for "those who drafted and approved the rules of engagement which permitted this illegal use of lethal fire."

Among the dead were 35 children, three paramedics and two journalists. Another 6,106 demonstrators were wounded during the demonstrations.

The UN expert reiterated that international human rights instruments pertaining to law enforcement state that firearms may only be used against persons if there is an imminent threat to life or risk of serious injury.

Moreover, in the context of an occupation, the killings at the Gaza fence resulted from the unlawful use of force, which "might well constitute wilful

killings of the protected population” – a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and potentially a war crime under the [Rome Statute](#).

“We must ensure legal accountability and end impunity for the excessive use of force against largely peaceful Palestinian demonstrators, and the resulting arbitrary deprivation of life,” stressed the UN expert.

Calling the killings “a grave violation of their right to life,” Mr. Lynk said, “it abrogates their guaranteed freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association.”

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He also endorsed the Commission’s recommendations that Gaza’s de facto authorities, the extremist group Hamas, which has controlled the region since 2006, failed to prevent the indiscriminate use of incendiary kites and balloons, causing “economic damage and civilian fear in southern Israel”.

The Special Rapporteur welcomed the Commission’s attention to the dire living conditions in Gaza that have fuelled the large demonstrations over the past year and endorsed its call that Israel immediately lift the Gaza blockade that has repeatedly been described by recent UN Secretaries-General as a prohibited form of collective punishment of Gaza’s population.

He also pointed to the dire impact the blockade has posed on the Gazan health system, which has significantly contributed to the deteriorating quality of health in the Strip.

As the one-year anniversary nears of the beginning of the protests on 30 March, which Gazans refer to as the “Great March of Return”, and in view of the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation, the Special Rapporteur fears an increase in violence if firm action is not taken toward accountability and justice.

“Continuing to suffocate Gaza is a blot on the world’s conscience and a recipe for more bloodshed,” Mr. Lynk said.

“Restoring Gaza and ensuring justice and accountability would give the region hope that a better Middle East is possible”, he concluded.