

UN expert denounces killing of more Palestinian protesters, as 'affront to human rights'

As protests continue at the Gaza border fence against Israeli policies, so does the killing and wounding of Palestinian protesters, including children, by the Israeli security forces, said a UN independent human rights expert on Tuesday. With the death toll rising, the UN Special Rapporteur who monitors the human rights situation in the Palestinian territory, [denounced](#) the violence as an “ongoing affront to human rights and human dignity”.

“The deaths of seven more participants in the Gaza demonstrations, and the wounding of more than 200 others this past Friday, indicates that the Israeli security forces are not heeding the international criticism of their use of lethal fire against Palestinian demonstrators,” said UN Special Rapporteur [Michael Lynk](#) in a statement, explaining that protesters “appear to pose no credible threat to Israeli security forces.”

Two of the Palestinians killed on Friday were boys aged 11 and 14. One Gaza-based human rights group, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, estimates that 163 of the injured demonstrators were shot with live fire.

The demonstrations at the border fence against Israel’s longstanding blockade and the deteriorating living conditions in Gaza – referred to by Palestinians as the “Great March of Return” – started on 30 March. Since then, more than 150 have been killed by the Israeli security forces and more than 10,000 demonstrators have been wounded; over half by live fire, the expert’s statement explained. Some are now left with devastating and life-long injuries.

“International human rights law imposes strict obligations on the use of force by law enforcement officials,” said Mr. Lynk. “Lethal force against demonstrators is absolutely forbidden unless strictly unavoidable in the case of an imminent threat to life or threat of serious injury,” he stressed, insisting that “many of those killed and wounded appear to have presented no such imminent threat”.

“The killing and wounding of demonstrators, in the absence of any strictly-measured justification, and within the context of occupation, may amount to willful killing, which is both a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and a war crime,” he warned. “It is also a serious violation of international human rights law and its protections for the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.”

The human rights expert expressed hope that the independent and international [Commission of Inquiry](#), launched in May by the Human Rights Council, will be able to carry out a comprehensive investigation into the deaths and injuries

in Gaza over the past six months.

“Accountability is paramount in the global quest to advance human rights and to bring perpetrators to justice in accordance with the rule of law,” Mr. Lynk said.

As the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, tensions are rising in the Strip. On Monday, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees ([UNRWA](#)) temporarily [withdrew](#) part of its international staff from Gaza following a “series of worrying security incidents affecting its personnel”, including harassment by individuals protesting recent measures resulting from UNRWA’s limited funding.

However, the agency continues to carry out its relief operations to the best of its capacity and several international staff, including the head of operations, will remain in Gaza.