



# INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

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## **Israel, Lebanon and Gaza Strip: UN to take immediate action to protect civilians in Lebanon and Gaza**

Following the latest escalation of Israeli air raids and military incursions into Lebanon that have dramatically impacted on the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) has called today on the UN to take immediate action to protect the civilian population in Lebanon, as well as in the Gaza Strip.

“The widespread lethal impact of the Israeli armed operations on Lebanese civilians and infrastructure has to stop immediately”, said Mr Federico Andreu-Guzman, deputy Secretary-General of the ICJ. The organization is extremely concerned by the apathy of the international community and the inactivity of key governments toward the ongoing Israeli military actions in Lebanon as well as in Gaza, and the widespread killings and suffering of people. The ICJ calls on the Security Council - or the General Assembly if the Security Council is unable to come to an agreement - to take immediate and effective measures to stop the military escalation in which civilians have already paid a huge price. “Such measures may include the dispatch of a new UN multinational force or a drastic strengthening of the mandate of UNFIL, and a substantive enlargement of its personnel”, added Mr Andreu-Guzman. Time is of the essence, and any further procrastination by the international community and the UN would be irresponsible.

For the past eight days and nights, the Israeli air forces have destroyed countless civilian buildings, infrastructure and means of transportation in operations that have killed more 300 people – most of them civilians - and wrecked havoc on Lebanese cities, harbours, airports and other infrastructure, leading to the displacement of more than half a million people. Appalled by the impact of the ruthless military operations, the ICJ recalls that Israel has to unconditionally respect the lives and security of civilians and abide by the Geneva Conventions to which it is a party. Under the law of war, intentional attacks against the civilian population as such or against civilians not taking direct part in hostilities, as well as the extensive destruction of property not justified by military necessity, constitute war crimes. The wanton destruction of the Beirut airport and civilian aircrafts are blatant examples of these destructions. Similarly, the bombing of undefended towns, villages and dwellings that are not military objectives, as well as the intentional attacks that will knowingly cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians also constitute war crimes for which individuals can be held criminally responsible.

“While Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself against hostage-taking and the launching of rockets by the Hezbollah over Israeli territory, this right is not unlimited and is subject to the restrictions of international law,” said Mr Andreu-Guzman. “Indeed, the disproportionate and indiscriminate reactions of the Israeli military are reprisals against the civilian population and thus amount to collective punishment. Collective punishments constitute a war crime under international law”, added Mr Andreu-Guzman.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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For its part, the Hezbollah has fired rockets on Northern Israeli towns, killing 15 civilians to date and wounding dozens of others, while damaging or destroying houses. The ICJ recalls that members of armed groups also have to fully abide by the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit targeting civilians. As for the capturing of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah last week, under international law, enemy combatants held prisoners by the other party should be granted prisoner-of-war status in accordance with the III Geneva Convention. The taking of hostages is strictly forbidden by international law and thus constitutes a war crime.

While international attention is focused on Israeli army attacks in Lebanon, the Israeli army has continued its air and land operations in the Gaza Strip, reportedly killing members of armed groups but also killing and wounding more than 50 people such as during the latest operation in Mughazi camp. Armed members of Hamas also have to fully abide by the Geneva Conventions and should stop firing rockets at civilian areas.

The ICJ calls on Israel and on armed groups to immediately stop targeting civilians and fully respect international humanitarian law.

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