

Israel's attacks on Gazan civilians 'apparent war crimes': HRW

Human Rights Watch accused the Israeli military of carrying out attacks on non-military Palestinian targets that "apparently amount to war crimes" during an 11-day offensive on the Gaza Strip that began on May 10.

The international human rights organisation issued its conclusions on Tuesday after investigating three Israeli air raids that it said killed 62 Palestinian civilians. It concluded that "there were no evident military targets in the vicinity" of the attacks, according to Al Jazeera.

The report focused on Israeli actions during the fighting, and the group said it would issue a separate report on the actions of Hamas and other Palestinian anti-occupation resistance groups in August.

"Israeli forces carried out attacks in Gaza in May that devastated entire families without any apparent military target nearby," said Gerry Simpson, associated crisis and conflict director at HRW on the organisation's website.

There was no immediate reaction to the report by the Israeli military, which has claimed its attacks were aimed at military targets in Gaza.

Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, fired rockets towards Israel after the latter ignored an ultimatum demanding Israel stand down its security forces from the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Al-Quds after days of violence



A Palestinian woman stands next to an unexploded bomb dropped by an Israeli F-16 warplane on Gaza City's Rimal neighbourhood, Palestine, on May 18, 2021.

against Palestinian protesters.

Israeli security forces had been violently suppressing demonstrations against Israel's raids and attacks on worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and the threatened expulsion of dozens of Palestinian families in favour of settlers in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

According to Gaza's Health Ministry,

some 260 people were killed in Gaza, including at least 67 children and 39 women. Twelve civilians, including two children, were killed in Israel, along with one soldier.

The HRW report said the most serious Israeli air attack, on May 16, involved a series of attacks on Al-Wahda Street, a central thoroughfare in Gaza City. The air

raids destroyed three apartment buildings and killed a total of 44 civilians, HRW said, including 18 children and 14 women. Twenty-two of the dead were members of a single family, the Al-Kawlaks.

Israel has claimed that the attacks were aimed at tunnels used by Hamas fighters in the area and that the damage to the homes was unintentional.

In its investigation, HRW concluded that Israel had used US-made GBU-31 precision-guided bombs and had not warned any of the residents to evacuate the area ahead of time. It also found no evidence of military targets in the area.

"An attack that is not directed at a specific military objective is unlawful," it wrote.

The investigation also looked at a May 10 explosion that killed eight people, including six children, near the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun. It said the two adults were civilians.

The report noted that Human Rights Watch found no evidence of a military target at or near the site of the strike.

The third attack it investigated occurred on May 15, in which an Israeli air raid destroyed a three-storey building in Gaza's Shati refugee camp. The attack killed 10 people, two women and eight children.

HRW investigators determined the building was hit by a US-made guided missile. Israel has claimed that senior Hamas officials were hiding in the building but HRW said it found no evidence of a military target at or near the site and called for an investigation into whether there was a legitimate military objective and "all feasible precautions" were taken to avoid civilian casualties.

Leverkusen blast

One person died and 16 people were injured Tuesday following an explosion at a chemical park in the western German city of Leverkusen, the site operator said, AFP reported.

Indonesia reports record 2,069 virus deaths in 24 hours

Indonesia reported a record 2,069 coronavirus deaths in 24 hours on Tuesday as the Southeast Asian nation faces its deadliest COVID-19 surge since the pandemic began.

Tuesday's grim tally was nearly 600 deaths higher than the previous day and topped last week's daily record of 1,566 deaths, the Health Ministry said.

New infections also shot up to just over 45,000, from about 28,000 on Monday, according to AFP.

The eye-watering data comes after Indonesia this week loosened virus curbs by allowing small shops, street-side restaurants and some shopping malls to reopen after a three-week partial lockdown.

But health experts warned it could trigger a fresh wave of cases, as the highly infectious Delta variant tears across the vast archipelago, which has overtaken India and Brazil to become the global pandemic epicentre.

Shopping malls and mosques in less affected parts of the Muslim-majority nation also got the green light to open their doors from Monday, to limited crowds and with shorter hours.

Offices were still under shutdown orders.

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation where tens of millions live hand to mouth, has avoided strict lockdowns seen in some other countries.

But the government has been widely criticised for its handling of the pandemic and policies that critics say prioritised Southeast Asia's largest economy over public health.

President Joko Widodo has pointed to falling daily infection and hospital occupancy rates, including in the hard-hit capital Jakarta, as justification for the easing.

But the Delta variant has been detected in about a dozen regions outside Jakarta, densely populated Java and Bali, where infections have also soared in recent weeks.

Indonesia's vaccination levels remain well below the government's one-million-a-day target for July and less than seven percent of its 270 million people have been fully inoculated with two jabs.

The country has reported a total of more than 3.2 million cases and 86,835 virus deaths, but those official figures are widely believed to be a severe undercount due to low testing and tracing rates.



OKY LUKMANSYAH/ANTARA FOTO

Mexican president says Biden must make decision on Cuba embargo

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said Monday that he thinks U.S. President Joe Biden must make a decision about the embargo against the Caribbean nation of Cuba.

Lopez Obrador said it was not enough for countries to vote to end the embargo via the United Nations General Assembly, but that it was time to make a real decision about it, given that "almost all countries of the world" are against it, Reuters reported.

"It is not conceivable that in these times they want to punish an independent country with a blockade," Lopez Obrador said.

"I think that President Biden must make a decision about it. It is a respectful call, from no point of view of interference, but we must separate the political from the humanitarian."

Cuban families should also face fewer restrictions on re-



Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador

ceiving remittances from those who live in the United States or any other country, Lopez Obrador added.

"How can it be blocked if it's not even government money?" Lopez Obrador said.

Remittances to Cuba are be-

lieved to be around \$2 billion to \$3 billion annually, representing its third biggest source of dollars after the services industry and tourism.

The transfers have been slowed by policies brought in under U.S. former president Donald Trump that led Western Union to close Cuban operations.

Lopez Obrador says the U.S. embargo is a cause of the recent protests.

The Cuban government has blamed the protests mostly on U.S.-financed "counter-revolutionaries" exploiting economic hardship caused by decades-old U.S. embargo.

On Monday, Cuba denounced the targeting of its Paris Embassy as a "terrorist attack" encour-

aged by the United States after the building was bombarded with Molotov cocktails, according to AFP.

Firefighters in the French capital said two incendiary devices were thrown at the delegation, located in the city's 15th arrondissement, causing minor damage.

"We denounce the Molotov cocktail terrorist attack against our Embassy in Paris @EmbassyCubaFrance," Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said on Twitter.

"I hold the US government responsible for its continued campaigns against our country that encourage this behavior and for its calls for violence, with impunity, from its territory," he tweeted.

Taliban advance, NATO calls for 'negotiated settlement' in Afghanistan

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said a "negotiated settlement" is necessary in Afghanistan, as the Taliban militant group advances in the country.

"The security situation in Afghanistan remains deeply challenging, and requires a negotiated settlement. NATO will continue to support Afghanistan, including with funding; civilian presence; and out-of-country training," Stoltenberg tweeted on Tuesday after speaking to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

Fighting continues in Afghanistan as peace negotiations between the Kabul government and the Taliban have so far failed to reach an agreement to end the war. Violence has surged since early May. The United Nations recorded nearly 2,400 Afghan civilian casualties in clashes between Taliban militants and government forces in the month of May and June alone, marking a new high in 12 years, Press TV reported.

In a report released on Monday, the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) warned that the country could see the highest number of civilians killed since it began keeping records in 2009.

US President Joe Biden said that the withdrawal of US-led foreign troops will be completed by the end of August, bringing 20 years of war to an end.

The United States, along with its NATO allies, invaded Afghanistan in October 2001. The invasion, which has led to the longest war in US history, removed the Taliban from power, but it worsened the security situation in the country.

The Taliban militants are now intensifying their attacks as the foreign forces complete the withdrawal. The US and its NATO allies are blamed for the surge in violence in Afghanistan, and many say the invaders have failed to stabilize the security situation in the country.

The militants are believed to control about half of Afghanistan's roughly 400 districts.

Nearly 60 of Europe-bound migrants drown after boat capsizes off coast of Libya

At least 57 migrants drowned after their boat sank off Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said, the latest tragedy on the dangerous Mediterranean Sea crossing to Europe.

"Horrorified by yet another painful loss of life off the Libyan coast," Federico Soda, the IOM's Libya mission chief, said on Twitter on Monday.

"At least 57 people drowned today in the latest tragedy... Silence and inaction are inexcusable."

The ship sank off the Libyan port of Khoms, some 120 kilometres (75 miles) east of the capital Tripoli, the IOM added, according to AFP.

Libya is a key gateway for Europe-bound migrants.

It was not immediately clear what caused the boat to sink, but vessels leaving the North African coast for Europe are often heavily overloaded makeshift crafts, departing at night even in rough weather to avoid detection by the coastguard.

"Survivors who spoke to our staff said 20 women and two children were among those who lost their lives," the IOM said, adding the latest tragedy "highlights the immediate need" for "state-led SaR (search and rescue) capacity" on the dangerous route.

The Libyan coast guard picked up more than

13,000 people in the first half of this year, exceeding the total figure for 2020, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Earlier this month, the IOM said that the number of people who have died trying to cross the Mediterranean nearly doubled in the first half of 2021 compared to the same period last year.



Birds fly off an abandoned wooden boat, seen from the German NGO migrant rescue ship Sea-Watch 3 in the search and rescue zone off the North African coast, in the Western Mediterranean Sea, on July 26, 2021.

The European Union has for several years supported Libyan forces to try to stem migration, despite often grim conditions in detention centres in Libya.

International agencies have repeatedly denounced the return to Libya of migrants intercepted at sea.

Hungarians protest against illegal surveillance with Israel's Pegasus spyware

Hungarians protested on Monday over allegations that the government used Israeli-made Pegasus spyware for illegal surveillance of public figures in Hungary, drawing comparisons with the country's communist past.



Hungarians protest against the government for the alleged use of Pegasus spyware to monitor journalists, opposition leaders and activists in Budapest, Hungary, on July 26, 2021.

Protesters gathered at the House of Terror Museum in the capital, Budapest, which commemorates victims of Nazism and communism, and marched to the headquarters of the governing Fidesz party, according to Reuters.

Criticising Prime Minister Viktor Orban, some chanted: "Victor!" "This (allegations of illegal surveillance) was the last straw for me," said one protester, Marcell Csupor. "This reminds me of communist systems, and shows that the country is breaking away from the West and drifting towards the East."

The government, which is at odds with many other European Union member states over rule-of-law and democracy issues, has not commented on the allegations beyond saying Hungary's intelligence-gathering is conducted lawfully.

A report by a group of 17 international media organisations and Amnesty International this month said the Pegasus spyware, made and licensed by Israeli company NSO, was used in hacking and attempts to hack smartphones belonging to journalists, human rights activists and government officials in several countries.

Direkt36, the Hungarian partner in the group of media outlets, said those targeted for surveillance included journalists, businessmen, lawyers and people critical of the Hungarian government.

Hungarian prosecutors have launched an investigation into multiple complaints received since the reports.

NSO has said its product was intended only for use by vetted government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fight terrorism and crime.

In Hungary, which was ruled by communists for four decades after World War Two, the minister of justice approves surveillance in matters of national security.