

UN Human Rights in Occupied Palestinian Territory

Ramallah

22 March 2023

Attacks on the humanitarian aid distribution system

OHCHR is alarmed by the recent series of attacks on aid warehouses and police officers and others reportedly providing security for the delivery of humanitarian aid. In the last week alone, at least three warehouses storing humanitarian assistance have been struck – in Rafah on 13 March, An Nuseirat on 14 March and Jabalya on 19 March – each reportedly resulting in fatalities. Meanwhile, since early February, at least four senior police officials were reportedly killed across Gaza, including the latest reported killing of the director of An Nuseirat Police on 19 March. Open-source information indicates in at least three other incidents, police vehicles or those providing security to aid trucks were struck since early February.

Directing attacks against civilians not directly participating in hostilities constitutes a violation of both the principle of distinction and the right to life under international law and amounts to a war crime. Members of law enforcement agencies, such as the civil police, are civilians and cannot be targeted on the basis of their status as members of a police force. They lose their protection from attack under strict circumstances, that is, by directly participating in hostilities and only for the duration of such participation. Such attacks have also contributed to the breakdown of civil order, creating an environment of growing chaos in which it is increasingly the strongest, often young men, who are able to monopolise the little assistance available and further deprive the most vulnerable of their access to food and other necessities of life and exposing them to increased risk of death from starvation and disease.

Israel, as the occupying power, has the obligation to ensure the provision of food and medical care to the population commensurate with their needs, and if it is unable to do so, it must at the very least facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations to deliver that assistance and the access of the population to it in a safe and dignified manner. Israel must also ensure entry of humanitarian aid and all other goods necessary for the survival of the civilian population at the required scale, facilitate the rebuilding of civilian infrastructure and ensure the safety of convoys, routes, warehouses, distribution sites, aid seekers and those securing and delivering aid.

#Ends

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