

Justice in the News: A response to Targeting of Media in Gaza

Report of Solidarity Mission to Gaza
21-23 January 2009



Al Aqsa Television Station, bombed 28 December 2008 on the second day of the Israeli military offensive in Gaza. Gaza City, 22 January 2009. Photo: Anne Poulsen/IMS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This visit to the Gaza Strip of international journalists' leaders from the region and the wider global community of journalists, sponsored by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Federation of Arab Journalists (FAJ), was carried out from 22-23 January 2009 immediately after the unilateral ceasefire declared first by Israel and subsequently by the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas

The Mission, to assess the violations and threats to media workers covering the military conflict in Gaza, found that media were subject to intimidation, direct military assault and deliberately prevented from working freely during the 22-day military offensive launched by Israel.

The findings confirm evidence of frequent targeting of media during the operations. Attacks on media by Israeli forces inside Gaza followed the blockade of foreign media which had been partially imposed on November 5 and was made total when hostilities began on 27 December 2008. The ban on foreign journalists was maintained despite an Israeli Supreme Court order of January 2 allowing access to Gaza to a limited number of journalists. Throughout this period there was a lack of safety and basic protection for media workers in Gaza.

The evidence of targeting is set out in detail within the report. In particular,

- 28 December 2008: the bombing of the offices of Hamas' TV station al-Aqsa in the al-Nasr district of Gaza City;
- 9 January 2009: the attack on al-Johara Tower, in Al-Rimal neighbourhood in Gaza City, which was hit twice by Israeli aircraft, even though the building was clearly marked as housing media staff;
- 15 January 2009: the attack on the al-Shuroug Tower in Omar al-Mukhtar Street housing several media groups.

These actions and the ban on access to Gaza by foreign journalists is further evidence of concerted efforts by Israel to intimidate, control and manage media. Israeli journalists have been denied access to Gaza since October 2006. For many years, journalists working for Palestinian media in the region have been unable to get access to Israeli-controlled press accreditation which would allow travel between Gaza and the West Bank. They also have been unable to travel to Jerusalem where many of the Palestinian and foreign media offices are based.

The Mission concludes that a full investigation into these violations of international law and unjustified interference in the work of media is required. Israel should be held accountable by the international community for its violations of international law protecting journalists in armed conflicts, including its disregard for the Geneva Conventions and the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1738.

The Mission found that, in spite of the ceasefire, threats and intimidation of media continue. There are political attempts to control media by Hamas amidst a continuing atmosphere of lawlessness and threats. There were reports of humanitarian help to media being seized and confiscated by Hamas.

The Mission makes a series of urgent recommendations for practical humanitarian and professional actions to assist Palestinian journalists.

INTRODUCTION

In the days immediately following the Israeli bombardment the IFJ received disturbing reports of the military targeting of media houses and of injuries and deaths sustained by journalists. Between 28 December and 23 January, the IFJ issued 15 press statements on issues related to the treatment of journalists and media. These are attached to this report (Appendix One).

In addition, the IFJ

- launched a humanitarian and solidarity appeal among its affiliates including the organisation of a Gaza Journalists Defence Committee;
- called upon the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon to investigate alleged violations by Israel of international law;
- made available the International Safety Fund to assist the families of media victims of violence;
- organised the transfer of 24 bullet-proof vests to the area; and
- pledged to make a thorough examination of the actions of the Israeli authorities and their treatment of media, including violent intimidation of journalists, denial of access to the conflict zone and attempts to manipulate media coverage.

During this period the IFJ was in constant contact with the Palestine Journalists Syndicate, including the Gaza representative Sakher Abou El Oun and Naim Toubassi, the Executive Committee member and PJS President who is based in the West Bank.

In response to these developments the IFJ Mission was prepared. The Mission was led by Aidan White, General Secretary of the IFJ aidan.white@ifj.org and Makram Mohamed Ahmed, General Secretary of the Federation of Arab Journalists (FAJ) and President of the Egyptian Journalists' Union. info-faj@faj.org.eg / missraniaali@hotmail.com

Other participants were:

Patrick Kamenka (EFJ, SNJ-CGT, France, pkamenka@hotmail.com);
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Anne Poulsen, (International Media Support, apo@i-m-s.dk)

Hussein Abdul Rahman, of the Kuwait Association of Journalists, who had planned to join the Mission, was unable to travel due to ill health.

The aim of the Mission was to examine the impact on media of the military offensive by Israeli security forces against Hamas which lasted from the 27 December 2008 until 18 January when a ceasefire was declared. The Mission investigated the threats and intimidations facing media staff; met with journalists and media staff on the ground; and considered the needs for urgent action to ensure the safety and protection of journalists and media in the region.

Five media workers were killed in the war and up to 15 seriously injured according to Palestinian Journalists Syndicate. The details of those affected are attached as is an interview with the family of one of the victims, Basil Faraj (Appendix Two).

The Gaza Strip is home to some 1.5 million Palestinians – of whom three-quarters are registered with the United Nations as refugees. It covers an area 40 kilometres long and between 12 and six kilometres wide and has one of the highest densities of population on earth.

Gaza is the stronghold of Hamas, which won the parliamentary elections in January 2006. In June 2007 an Israeli blockade was imposed as Hamas took control over Gaza after ousting the rival forces of Fatah, the party of the Government of Mahmoud Abbas based in Ramallah on the West Bank.

The declared aim of Israel was to isolate Hamas and keep it from firing short-range rockets over the border into nearby Israeli towns. A consequence of the blockade was to reduce to less than a quarter the volume of imported supplies compared to the level of December 2005, paralysing the economy and threatening the welfare of the inhabitants.

In June 2008, Hamas and Israel agreed to a six month ceasefire, brokered by Egypt. However, although reduced, rocket fire from Gaza into Israel continued in the first few months of the ceasefire.

In November 2008, Israeli forces carried out an attack inside Gaza with Hamas retaliating with further fire.

On 17 December, militants fired 19 rockets into Israel, according to Israeli military sources and on 18 December, Hamas ended the ceasefire claiming that Israel had broken the truce maintaining the blockade and carrying out attacks against Hamas.

On 27 December, Israel began its military offensive with the launch of 30 missiles on Gaza City in the largest military operation by Israeli forces in the Palestinian Territories since 1967. Later ground forces were sent into the territory and there was also military fire from Israeli naval vessels offshore.

A ceasefire was unilaterally declared on 17 January by Israel following discussions between representatives of the two sides in Cairo. In line with these talks Hamas a few days later declared its own truce. At the time of writing there is no agreed final ceasefire and there have been a number of violent exchanges between the two sides.

According to Palestinian medical sources, at least 1,300 Palestinians have been killed and more than 5,000 injured during the conflict. 13 Israelis have been killed. The economic costs are substantial. The United Nations has said that it will cost billions of dollars to rebuild the damaged infrastructure. Some 4,000 homes were destroyed and 17,000 damaged during the military offensive.

In the aftermath of the conflict the General Secretary of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon visited the areas and condemned Israel over alleged violations of international law in its conduct citing attacks on civilian institutions and the illegal use of white phosphorus shells which can cause horrific burns.

Furthermore, according to one journalist caught in the crossfire of the ground fight, the troops had no rules of engagement and often engaged in indiscriminate firing. **Lorenzo Cremonesi** of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, told how he was personally pinned down for two hours and under fire from an Israeli unit, before being able to indicate to them that he was an unarmed civilian. "It's a miracle I'm still alive," he said.

It is important to note that the conditions for journalism in Palestine have been severely compromised in recent years by political divisions in Palestine.

Hostile actions against journalists, including detentions and allegations of torture in some cases, have been taken against individual journalists suspected by giving support to one side or another.

Both the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas administration in Gaza have been responsible.

Journalists have been severely affected by this political schism and the organisation of the Palestine Journalists Syndicate, which strives to represent all journalists equally, has been disrupted.

Professional journalists in Gaza work in a constant climate of tension and fear. The Gaza representative of the Palestine Journalists' Syndicate told the Mission that an



Hamas Gunmen Blindfold Their Captive After a Street Arrest Photo: Aidan White

atmosphere of intimidation is created by Hamas insistence on its supporters playing a leading role in the work of the journalists' organisation.

Indeed, Hamas informed the PJS that it would not allow a PJS delegation to receive the Mission and insisted that a group of journalists, including its own supporters, should meet with Mission members.

As a result, a meeting with journalists in Gaza City was disrupted by the presence of Hamas supporters. Consequently, many genuine and independent journalists stayed away. Even the welcoming dinner for the Mission members organised by the PJS was suddenly expanded at the last moment to include official Hamas representatives.

The atmosphere of lawlessness in Gaza is pervasive. Mission members witnessed and photographed plain-clothes gunmen carrying out a street arrest, which we were told was a "routine" action. We were also informed that security vests transferred into Gaza for use by journalists had been impounded.

Given this atmosphere, the situation on the ground for journalists is extremely difficult where they are caught in the crossfire of factional politics and subject to intense local scrutiny by Palestinian groups.

TARGETING OF MEDIA

The Mission members are in no doubt that the military action against journalists and media installations by Israel in Gaza, which were premeditated and precise, were in violation of international law, especially the Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians and journalists in armed conflict zones and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1738 of 23 December 2006 on the protection of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel.

These findings are borne out by substantiated evidence gathered during the Mission which suggests that Israel knew or ought to have known that the victims of its attacks were journalists and media installations which are protected by international law. Israel had been provided with media installations' coordinates which clearly identified their location. Moreover, journalists' vehicles and offices bore clear "press" and "TV" markings to identify them to military forces on ground, sea and air.

Furthermore, the Mission found no evidence to indicate that media were involved directly in the fighting or played any strategic or operational role in military activity which would place them and their facilities outside the protection of international law. While it is acknowledged that some news organisations took an editorial line which was favourable to Hamas and hostile to Israel. However, this does not make them enemy combatants that can legitimately be targeted for military purposes.

The frequency and pattern of targeting of media by Israel, even when precise information had been freely made available to its military about the location of media houses, points to a clear strategy of intimidation designed to prevent media from reporting independently on the conflict.

What follows is an outline of the timing of the attacks on media and organisations that were targeted and a note on the provisions of international law and a brief commentary on the issues involved.

CHRONOLOGY OF ISRAELI ATTACKS ON MEDIA IN GAZA

28 December 2008

Israeli fighter planes destroyed the offices of *Al Aqsa Television*. The station is used by Hamas and is hostile to Israel in its partisan coverage of the region. Its studio building was destroyed and one cameraman reported injured.

4 January 2009

Israel military fired on a utility vehicle from *Al Aqsa TV* with clear “TV” and “Press” markings, according to the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate.

5 January 2009

Israeli defence forces fired two missiles into the offices of the Hamas-affiliated *Al-Risala* newsweekly, causing extended damages to its headquarters. The paper had ceased publication during the conflict; according to its chief editor Wasseem Afifah who also said that the Rantisi printing headquarters where the paper was printed was bombed on the same day.

9 January 2009

The Al-Johara Tower, an eight-storey building in Al-Rimal area of Gaza city was hit twice by Israeli fighter jets. The building was clearly marked as housing media staff and organisations.

Up to 20 news organisations work inside the building, including the Iranian English language Press TV and Arabic-language network of *Al-Alam*. One journalist, Manar Shalolah, editor of the Saudi *Ekhpareyah TV* was slightly injured and the satellite transmission equipment on the roof of the building destroyed.

15 January 2009

The al-Shuroug Tower, a building housing several news organisations including *Reuters*, *NBC*, *Fox News*, *Sky News*, *Al-Arabiya* and *Abu Dhabi TV* channels in downtown Gaza was hit by an Israeli missile.

Journalists Mohamed As-Susi and Ayman Al-Rezi both working for the *Abu Dhabi TV* were injured in the attack which also destroyed many broadcast and production equipments.

The management of the Tower said they had provided their coordinates to the Israeli army and received assurances that they would not be attacked. *Reuters* also confirmed that an Israeli army spokesman had contacted their office in Jerusalem shortly before the attack to verify the location of the news agency’s office in Gaza.

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND COMMENTARY ON IMPACT OF TARGETING

The report's findings support the view that targeting media in Gaza constituted a breach of international law in so far they failed to comply with provisions on the protection of civilians, including journalists as provided for in the Additional Protocol I of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Convention 1949.

Article 79 of the Protocol states (in paragraph 1 & 2):

1. Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians within the meaning of Article 50, paragraph 1.

2. They shall be protected as such under the Conventions and this Protocol, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians, and without prejudice to the right of war correspondents accredited to the armed forces to the status provided for in Article 4 A (4) of the Third Convention.

Furthermore, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1738 unanimously adopted on 23 December 2006 states in consideration 2:

[.....] journalists, media professionals and associated personnel engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians and shall be respected and protected as such, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians [...]

At no time has Israel sought to justify its attacks on the media on account of their involvement in the fighting. The fact that some of the news organisations in Gaza may have an editorial line which can be considered hostile to Israel does not afford justification for attacking the media.

Indeed, Mission members took many testimonies from local people which indicate there was no military activity taking place from media sites.

The attacks on media inside Gaza and the treatment of media outside the immediate conflict zone deserve special attention because they call into question the right of media to work freely. They worryingly suggest that existing protections under international law have been wilfully ignored.

In wartime it is accepted that governments put a priority on building the morale of their 'own' people and armed forces. It normally follows that that they abandon notions of fairness and objectivity and use propaganda and lies to demonise the enemy, its leadership and its people. In modern times this is seen in the sophisticated application of public relations, spin and communications control. This was much in evidence during the Gaza conflict.

All of this is well known and worries serious journalists, but as the statements of the IFJ and the FAJ during the conflict indicate, it was the deliberate targeting of media houses by Israel during the conflict which raised fears that Israeli actions,

unprecedented in their intensity and scope, recklessly endangered the lives of journalists and have increased the risks facing media covering future conflicts in the region and beyond.

While it is no surprise that *Al Aqsa* television, the Hamas network, was one of the first targets hit by Israel in Gaza, the fact that Israel carried out strikes against two other buildings which provide office space to a wide range of different media from around the world indicate that attacks were designed to intimidate all media seeking to cover the conflict inside Gaza.

It is impossible not to conclude that this was part of strategic planning and was intended by policymakers and military leaders to intimidate journalists, even though the attacks put at risk journalists working in media, who like other civilians, enjoy legal protection under international law.

The criticism of these attacks (See appendix: *IFJ Condemns Israel for Strike on Television During Gaza Blitz; IFJ Calls for UN Action Over Targeting; and IFJ Demands End to Targeting as Israelis Strike Media Tower*) echoes condemnation by the IFJ in 2004 after an Israeli attack on the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation in the West Bank and in 2006 when Israel bombed the Hezbollah television station *Al Manar* in Lebanon. At the time of the Lebanon war the IFJ said this attack was

“a clear demonstration that Israel has a policy of using violence to silence media it doesn’t agree with. This action means media can become routine targets in every conflict. It is a strategy that spells catastrophe for press freedom and should never be endorsed by a government that calls itself democratic.”

Mohamed Said Thurya. Photo: Anne Poulsen/IMS



The Gaza conflict and Israeli actions against media suggest that these fears are more than justified. There is no doubt that the attacks on media in Gaza were deliberate and put journalists and other media staff in harm’s way.

Mohamed Said Thurya, Left, editor of the *al-Aqsa*, told the Mission that the television station was clearly targeted during the attacks. *“This is a civilian area; there are many*

houses around here. There were no rockets fired from here. Nobody hiding around here,” he said. The station was set up by Hamas in 2005. Although affiliated to Hamas, the editor denied it spread only propaganda against Israel.

“We are not propagandist for Hamas, but for the Palestinian people. We are the only local TV stations in the Gaza Strip and our aim is to represent what is happening on the ground to the world,” he said.

The attack on the Ash-Shurouq Tower on 15 January 2009 led the Foreign Press Association, representing foreign correspondents in the region to add its voice to criticism of this targeting.

The FPA issued a statement on 15 January saying it was

“alarmed to learn of the heavy firepower currently being employed by Israeli forces against the building in Gaza City that houses the Reuters news agency and other international media outlets. Initial reports are that these attacks have caused injury and damage.

“We also note that IDF bullets entered the windows of the offices of the Associated Press in a different part of the city today. We call on the military to halt this fire immediately. These are buildings housing journalists working for international news agencies and must not be targeted.

“We note that these buildings are well known landmarks in Gaza and that the IDF has been clearly notified of their location on several occasions. “

Ayman Ar-Rezi. Photo: Anne Poulsen

Ayman Ar-Rezi, Right, the injured journalist at Abu Dhabi TV, was interviewed by the Mission. He said he was working from his office at the Abu Dhabi TV station in the al-Shurouq Tower when the building was hit by an Israeli attack on 15 January 2009.



“I was in my office on the 14th floor of the building. We had been filming out of the window for some hours. We had started editing the material, when our office was hit. I fell to the ground. I had lost consciousness. When I woke up again, I found myself covered in blood and everything in the office destroyed. I was taken to the hospital. After one day, I had to leave, as there were already too many people in the hospital,” he said.

Ayman Ar-Rezi is in no doubt he was the victim of a targeted attack. *“It is clear that we were deliberately targeted. I think we were bombed, because the Israelis knew that we had material that they did not want to go on air.”*

For a long time, there had been rumours that the building would come under attack, according to Ayman Ar-Rezi. Representatives from the media organisations in the al-Shurouq Tower had talked to the Israeli military spokesperson who had assured them that the building would not be targeted.

The testimony and the evidence of the attacks against media in Gaza raise issues that go far beyond the immediate conflict in the Palestinian territories. They have a direct bearing on the treatment of media in many other existing conflicts. It is for this reason that the IFJ and FAJ believe they require urgent investigation and deliberation by the international community.

The central question raised is when, if ever, is it appropriate and/or legal to deliberately target the media as part of a military campaign? Did *Al Aqsa* or *Al Manar* in the Lebanon in 2006, for instance, constitute legitimate military targets? Or did Israel cross the line in targeting media outlets they believe are guilty of “propaganda”?

In addition, questions must be asked over justification for the attacks on other buildings housing media staff which could not be regarded, even by partisan observers, as “politically engaged” in this conflict.

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to examine both relevant precedent and the international laws protecting journalists in combat zones. The legality of all military actions is determined by the body of international laws and rulings that cover military actions in the past and apply to present-day conflict zones.

At its heart is the question of whether television channels which may be unprofessional, even propagandistic in nature are playing a role as an interested party on the battlefield.

Regrettably, the Israeli attacks on television stations are not without precedent. They follow a series of similar attacks in Western military campaigns.

In Belgrade in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003 military strikes against media, by NATO, the western military alliance, and the United States saw the targeting of media outlets, often with fatal consequences.

When NATO missile strikes at the RTS (*Radio Televizije Srbije*) TV and Radio Station in Belgrade in 1999, in which 16 media staff were killed, took place they were justified on the basis that communications equipment used by the station had dual purposes -- military and civilian. NATO claimed that RTS was part of the “propaganda machinery” associated with the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. In NATO’s eyes, RTS was a legitimate target, although this argument only emerged after initial justification of the strike as an attempt to silence war-mongering propaganda.

For this to be an acceptable interpretation it is necessary to set aside Protocol I (Article 79) of the Geneva Conventions which makes clear that journalists are to be treated as civilians, any journalist who engages in military action forfeits his or her status as a non-combatant. A civilian installation used for military purposes (even temporarily) is rendered legitimate as a military target.

What is not clear is when a journalist or media installation can be said to have moved from “civilian” to “military” classification under international law. This is left to the discretion and judgment of military planners with only internal military lawyers offering oversight.

The IFJ criticism of Israeli actions in Gaza is based on the opinion of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia which, in its consideration of the controversy that followed the NATO strike against RTS has ruled that *“propaganda alone is not a sufficient motive to justify an attack against the media that broadcast it.”*

It can be recalled that in 1946, during the Nuremburg Trials, a German officer in the Ministry of Propaganda was found “not guilty” in that his work for the ministry only served to inflame public opinion rather than to incite violence or encourage the population to commit atrocities.

Of course, where media are actively and strategically used as part of a campaign of violence they do become liable under international law. Journalists working for Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines in Rwanda, for instance, were found guilty of crimes against humanity for helping to incite the 1994 massacre of Rwanda’s Tutsi minority.

There is a difference between the rhetoric of propaganda – robust, even hateful opinion against a perceived enemy, such as Israel or the United States – and the incitement to active violence. At Radio Mille Collines, for instance, broadcasters directed listeners to places and encouraged their active participation in the killing of civilians.

Anyone who has watched *Al Aqsa* or *Al Manar* will know that there is often powerful language of resistance and opposition, much of it deeply offensive to Israelis and many others. But in the view of the IFJ it is not of such intensity or precision in terms of military activity as to justify military strikes under the terms of the Geneva Conventions.

The role of media and its influence has been a subject of international concern and debate in recent years, a concern flowing from the increasingly sophisticated use of communications and media by terrorist groups.

Political leaders, notably senior figures in the administration of President Bush in the last ten years have often expressed intemperate and controversial opinion about the work of emerging media voices in the Arab world, notably in the aftermath of September 11 – accusing pan-Arab stations like *Al Jazeera*, for instance, of being “Al Qaeda TV,” implying a direct link between this satellite station and Islamist terrorist networks.

This has caused concern within the media community that hitherto accepted protection under international law for media – including media representing different sides in a conflict and with a very different journalistic perspective – is no longer effective or applicable. There is a serious danger, warns the IFJ and others,

that there is a threat to all media when their programming or content is interpreted by one side or another as “propaganda” and this can be used to justify military action against unarmed civilians working in civilian installations.

It is for this reason that the IFJ and FAJ are convinced that the United Nations in its review and investigation of Israeli actions and the application of international law must include a review of targeted military strikes against media.

ISRAEL MEDIA BLOCKADE

The recent conflict has its roots in a continuing Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas effectively broke down in November 2008 after an Israeli raid killed six Hamas militants. The violence escalated with more Israeli raids, killing around 17 Hamas gunmen, and Palestinian militants firing dozens of rockets into southern Israel, injuring several people. Israel has kept its crossings into Gaza largely closed, allowing in only limited amounts of food and aid and keeping journalists out.

The media became major victims of this blockade when after months of attempting to limit access, the Israeli Defence Forces finally closed the Erez crossing, the main access point for media, on 27 December. This ban curtailed the free movement of journalists and media staff from Israel and the outside world.

The media blockade was accompanied by a sophisticated communication strategy encouraging media to focus on the impact of rocket attacks from inside on Israel itself. This blockade remained in force despite a ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court ruling on 2 January ordering the government to allow limited access by members of the international press to Gaza.

The Israeli actions provoked some forceful media reaction. David Mannion, the editor-in-chief of the UK-based *ITV News*, called the media ban “disgraceful”, and accused the Israelis of censoring the war. While pictures were coming out of Gaza from news agencies Reuters and Associated Press, having his crews stuck on the border, he said, meant events were increasingly difficult to verify.

“If Israel is saying that Hamas fired rockets from inside a school complex then let us in to verify that. It is frankly disgraceful for any democracy to prevent us from entering an area to report. It is up to us, not them, to decide if it is too dangerous to enter,” he added.

Daniel Seaman, director of Israel's government press office, angered many media commentators when he said that foreign journalists in Gaza would become a *“fig leaf and front for Hamas”*, comments that were condemned as “outrageous” by David Munk, Guardian deputy editor for international news, who said,

“Just because you happen to be in a place that Israel doesn't like you operating doesn't mean we'll be swept along by their Hamas propaganda. It is a deeply depressing situation when a country like Israel that prides itself on openness is not providing access to people from outside Gaza to see the full picture.” (Sources, Media Guardian.)

The IFJ and other media advocacy groups condemned the media blockade. The Jerusalem-based Foreign Press Association (FPA) representing foreign correspondents working in the region was behind the direct appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court which directed the military authorities to allow limited media access.

However, on 7 January the FPA issued a statement condemning the Israeli government's decision to continue the ban on international journalists entering Gaza. A handful of correspondents were allowed in but only as “embedded” reporters travelling with Israeli forces.

The FPA condemned this and again asked that the *“Israeli Government should ensure unfettered access for the world's media to Gaza during this crisis.”*

The persistent failure of the Israeli government to honour the ruling from its own Supreme Court was, said the FPA, an “unconscionable infringement” of basic democratic principles. (Statement, 13 January 2009.)

“The unprecedented denial of access to Gaza for the world's media amounts to a severe violation of press freedom and puts the state of Israel in the company of a handful of regimes around the world which regularly keep journalists from doing their jobs,” said the FPA.

The FPA also protested at the imposition of closed military zones in large sections of southern Israel, which occurred on top of the ban on international journalists entering Gaza.

“Taken together, the Gaza ban and the closed military zones amount to serious violations of press freedom,” said the FPA.

International media companies also protested. A group of media organisations sent a letter of protest to Israel's prime minister challenging a decision to ban journalists from entering Gaza. The *Associated Press*, *Reuters*, *CNN*, the *BBC* and other major news groups told Ehud Olmert,

“We are gravely concerned about the prolonged and unprecedented denial of access to the Gaza Strip for the international media,” they said. *“We would welcome an assurance that access to Gaza for international journalists will be restored immediately in the spirit of Israel's long-standing commitment to a free press.”*

Some high ranking officials of the United Nations and its agencies joined the chorus of criticism of the Israeli approach to media during the conflict in Gaza. The UN Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information, Kiyo Akasaka urged Israel to allow media access into Gaza, noting that *“the right to information is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”*

The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Koichiro Matsuura called on Israel *“to allow local and international media professionals to report on events”* in Gaza.

Israeli claims that this blockade was imposed for reasons of personal security of media staff were dismissed by the IFJ and others. A more likely basis for the ban was articulated by Shlomo Dror, a spokesman for Israel's defence ministry, who suggested Israel was not happy with press coverage from Gaza.

"Where Gaza is concerned, our image will always be bad," he said. "When journalists go in it works against us, and when they don't go in it works against us."

Journalists from Israel and the Palestinian territories are subject to special treatment have to pass a security check to receive an Israeli government press card and must sign a censorship form agreeing to submit articles, photographs and recordings relating to "*security and defence matters*" - although in practice this rarely happens.

For years Palestinian journalists have complained of discrimination against them by Israel in the allocation of press accreditation. The Foreign Press Association has worked vigorously for many years to ensure that local staff working with foreign media teams could receive accreditation allowing them to travel in the region.

After the ceasefire journalists were eventually allowed access, but security checks are extensive and media are subject to delays. Restrictions on all Palestinian journalists remain in place.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mission concluded that there is a lack of safety and basic protection for media workers in Gaza, many of them journalists and photographers working freelance. The dangers facing media staff are profoundly exacerbated by evidence of deliberate attacks on media by Israel in Gaza.

The Mission concluded that the ban on foreign journalists entering Gaza, imposed by the Israeli authorities on 27 December 2008, was evidence of concerted efforts by Israel to ban, control and manage media.

The Mission also found evidence of undue pressure on independent journalists and media workers from Hamas including reports of threats and assaults and seizure of humanitarian aid to media.

A) Recommendation Concerning Targeting of media by Israel

The IFJ and FAJ recommends that the United Nations undertakes a detailed investigation to investigate the evidence that Israel has violated international law, including Security Council Resolution 1738 on the protection of journalists in armed conflict.

The investigation should be based upon the initial findings of this Mission as well as further investigation on the ground.

The United Nations must not restrict its concerns to violations of international law concerning its own personnel and UN installations, but must investigate all violations of international law particularly those related to rights of journalists and media activity.

The recommendations in this area are directed to three groups:

1. To the United Nations

- to carry out detailed investigation into the targeting of media by Israel during the recent conflict in Gaza;
- to consult with the International Federation of Journalists, the Federation of Arab Journalists and other media freedom organisations which visited Gaza to discuss their own findings and testimonies;
- to establish an effective oversight mechanism to enforce the implementation of Resolution 1738 in close collaboration with media freedom organisations

2. To the Government of Israel

- to pay compensation to the families of killed and injured journalists;
- to pay for reparation of media infrastructure and equipment destroyed or damaged;
- to undertake that in the future all information received from media organisations concerning coordinates of their locations will be acknowledged formally;
- To facilitate media access to areas of conflict and allow independent reporting without interference.

3. To news organisations

- to inform the IFJ, the International News Safety Institute and other media freedom organisations of their locations and all the information they provide to the Government of Israel in this regard;
- to ensure journalists deployed to the Israel-Palestine conflict receive safety training and have adequate equipment for their protection .

B) Recommendations on Action to Assist and Defend Journalists

1. Safety training and material for the protection of journalists

Most of the journalists and photographers in the Gaza Strip are freelancers who have never had any basic safety training and who have never been equipped with even the most basic safety equipment. Adding to their vulnerability, only few media workers are covered by insurance. Furthermore, media workers, most of them young freelancers covering a war for the first time in their lives, are traumatized and are lacking professional counselling to deal with the post violence traumas.

In view of the volatile political environment in Gaza, the mission proposes three day safety training in Cairo comprising elements of trauma counselling, implemented by International News Safety Institute in cooperation with the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate in Gaza and the Egyptian Journalists' Union. Pending funding, 25 – 50 media workers will be invited to participate in the safety training, where they will also be equipped with the flak jackets, donated by IFJ/IMS, and other safety material such as first aid kits and safety manuals.

The training envisaged by the Mission should focus on combating sectarianism and strengthening the ethical profile of journalists in the region. The Ethical Journalism Initiative launched in the region by the IFJ in the days after the Mission and the structure of support created by Arab-language affiliates of the IFJ for this work should provide the basis for this urgent work.

2. Humanitarian aid to the media families affected by the violence

Through its Safety Fund the IFJ has decided to allocate EUR 10,000 to support the families of media workers who were killed or injured during the military offensive. The Federation of Arab Journalists is equally allocating EUR 10,000. The distribution of the money will be carried out in consultation with the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate representative in Gaza.

3. Promoting Solidarity among Palestinian journalists and assisting the Palestine Journalists Syndicate

Journalists in Gaza and the West Bank have suffered considerably from the power struggle between Fatah and Hamas. Years of delay and inaction have compromised the credibility of long-standing leaders who have not been re-elected.

The tension between the political factions has led to a divided Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate. It has paralyzed the activities of the Gaza branch of the syndicate and unity and solidarity is suffering immensely in the present political environment.

The mission proposes fresh measures to encourage solidarity among Palestinian journalists in Gaza and the West Bank and to assist the Palestine Journalists Syndicate. Included in the measures is the establishment of an interim committee which will set the framework for the first elections in more than 10 years and write a constitution for the PJS. A meeting in Cairo is to be attended by journalists from Gaza and West Bank, nominated by PJS representatives in both areas.

4. Supporting Professionalism and Ethical Conduct

To enable the rebuilding of professionalism in journalism in the region – suffering from years of sectarianism and division and political interference in the newsrooms – the mission recommends putting in place mechanisms which will support and contribute to the unity of journalists in Palestine.

These mechanisms include a series of round tables or seminars in Gaza and the West Bank gathering media workers and their leaders to promote a much needed debate within the Palestinian journalism fraternity to discuss solidarity and unity, ethics and professionalism in the media.

The round table discussions may result in a charter or a set of recommendations which could serve as a basis for the drafting of the constitution for the PJS and the further work of the syndicate.

Finally, the mission discussed the possibility of carrying out a second mission to Gaza around March/April to assess the needs for medium to long term activities.

Appendix One

IFJ Statements during Gaza Crisis

January 26 2009

IFJ Refutes Claim of Bias and Calls on Hamas to Protect Journalists

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) today strongly rebutted claims from political leaders in Gaza that it was biased in its claims of Hamas interference and intimidation of journalists. In a statement issued yesterday, Hamas accused the IFJ of "baseless statements" and "unacceptable partiality" following its comments after a two-day mission of international journalists' leaders to Gaza last week.

"Hamas is completely wrong to say that we do not criticise all sides in this conflict," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "An examination of our statements both recently and going back years shows that we are consistent in our condemnation of all sides. Israel, the Palestine Authority and Hamas - whoever puts journalists under pressure is in our sights. We have nothing to apologise for."

As recently as October 31 the IFJ publicly criticised both Hamas and The Palestine Authority for detention and intimidation of journalists claiming that these actions were "little more than a device for intimidation, media control and political infighting."

The IFJ also today called for Hamas to provide security and protection for all journalists working in Gaza, including those independent journalists who have represented journalists in the Palestine Journalists Syndicate. "We want Hamas to know that we hold them responsible for the safety and security of journalists, particularly when we are aware that individuals have been subject to threats and intimidation," said White.

The international mission to Gaza last week led by the IFJ and the Federation of Arab Journalists (FAJ) decided to support a detailed investigation to determine whether Israel has violated international law, including Security Council Resolution 1738 on the protection of journalists in armed conflict and concluded that "All sides must take their hands off the media and allow journalists to work freely without any form of intimidation."

January 26, 2009

IFJ Condemns New Israeli Targeting as Journalists Come Under Fire

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has today condemned Israeli attacks on journalists in Ramallah in which at least one foreign journalist was injured. Eye-witness reports say that journalists came under fire three times before a demonstration rally.

"This appears to be another example of reckless soldiering by Israeli forces," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "This was an incident that should never have

happened and which confirms that the already dangerous work of journalists in the region is put at further risk by the actions of Israeli military."

According to media reports, Israel's soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets in the direction of journalists and Palestinians who were marching towards the wall of separation during a demonstration in support of people in Gaza. The journalists were wearing clothing clearly marked as "press."

In a statement, the Spanish union of Catalan Journalists (SPC), IFJ affiliate, said the Cristina Rivas, journalist for the Catalan television who was a member of the Spanish crew in Ramallah including a journalist and a cameraman, was hit on the leg and sustained serious injuries. Cristina received initial treatment in a hospital in Ramallah before being flown back to Spain for further medical treatment.

January 25, 2009

IFJ and FAJ Call for Action to Protect Journalists after Tour of Gaza

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Federation of Arab Journalists and a number of journalists' leaders from Europe and the Arab world have concluded a two-day emergency mission to Gaza with a call for urgent action to improve the safety of journalists and media in the region.

"The Israeli army has left the scene after three weeks of turmoil and tragedy in which media have been in the firing line," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "But the threats and intimidation of media continue. We need to take urgent action to protect Palestinian journalists."

The mission met with local journalists' leaders, talked to media personnel injured and caught up in the fighting and toured media sites bombed by Israel during the conflict. The mission says a comprehensive package of measures is urgently needed including:

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The mission met with local journalists' leaders, talked to media personnel injured and caught up in the fighting and toured media sites bombed by Israel during the conflict. The mission says a comprehensive package of measures is urgently needed including:

1. Safety training and material for the protection of journalists; 2. Humanitarian aid to the media families affected by the violence; 3. A full investigation by the United Nations of targeting of media by Israel in violation of international law; 4. Measures to encourage solidarity among Palestinian journalists in Gaza and the West Bank and to assist the Palestine Journalists Syndicate; 5. Support for professional actions to counter undue political influence of media in the region which are affected by sectarianism which has divided the West Bank and Gaza.

“Israel has much to answer for and must be held accountable by the international community,” said White. “But we must take action now to ensure that journalists are protected and that political attempts to control media and journalism are ended.”

The IFJ says that the Hamas and Palestinian Authorities must stop interfering with media and must allow journalists to work freely.

“In Gaza we found evidence of intimidation by Hamas. This is completely unacceptable. We understand that humanitarian help to media including safety vests for journalists in danger have been seized and confiscated. This is intolerable,” said White.

“All sides must take their hands off the media and allow journalists to work freely without any form of intimidation.”

The IFJ and FAJ agreed to put in place mechanisms which will support and contribute to the unity of journalists in Palestine. "Journalists in Palestine have been victims of sectarianism and divisions," said White. "Now they must forge unity and harmony and keep self-serving politics out of the newsroom."

The IFJ thanked the FAJ for their prompt response to an appeal for joint action over the Gaza crisis and said the two organizations are committed to building professionalism in journalism in the region. The two organisations also agreed to consult over plans for a second mission involving leaders of journalists' unions in the coming weeks.

January 22, 2009

IFJ Praises Courageous Journalists as Mission Enters Gaza

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) today led a multinational delegation of journalists' unions from Europe and the Arab world into Gaza, only hours before Israel finally opened the area to the world's press. The aim of the mission, says the IFJ, is to support local journalists and to investigate the problems facing media during the conflict.

The IFJ, which has condemned vigorously Israeli targeting of media and the blockade on journalists entering Gaza over the last month, today also condemned Hamas for its threats and intimidation of journalists.

"We commend local journalists for the courage they showed in the face of deliberate and, in many cases, deadly attacks," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary and

head of the international mission to Gaza. "We strongly support the call of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the respect of international law during armed conflict and it is time for Israel to be held to account for serious violations of international law."

The IFJ also decided to support a detailed investigation to determine whether Israel has violated international humanitarian law, including Security Council Resolution 1738 on the protection of journalists in armed conflict.

"The last month has been hell for journalists working in Gaza," said Aidan White. "It is impossible to properly investigate the media situation in Gaza without considering the difficulties facing journalists, particularly because of the Hamas regime. It is clear that Hamas are no friends of media freedom and have been ruthless in their intimidation and manipulation of the media. The situation of journalists in Gaza was already intolerable without military activity and this latest conflict has not made it any better. The IFJ is particularly concerned by Hamas' attempts to interfere in the work of Palestinian journalists. Now that the violence has stopped, it is time for all sides, including Hamas, to allow journalists to work freely."

The IFJ is working with the Federation of Arab journalists to put in place mechanisms which will support and contribute to the unity among journalists in Palestine. "Journalists in Palestine have been victims of sectarianism and divisions," said White. "They must stand aside these and forge unity and harmony for the good of journalism in Palestine."

January 15 2009

IFJ Plans Investigation into Violations after Assault on Media in Gaza

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has today announced that it plans to organise a wide ranging investigation into Israeli actions against media during the current conflict in Gaza after another building housing media organisations was struck this morning by Israeli missiles.

"We are witnessing in Gaza unprecedented and deliberate attacks on media which put journalists and others in harm's way," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "There have been a string of such actions, and a concerted effort to ban, control and manage media, all of which demands full investigation."

The IFJ says it will support a wide ranging investigation particularly into the use of military force against media, which is a serious violation of international law and counter to Security Council resolution 1738 which provides protection of journalists and media personnel in conflict zones."

According to numerous press reports, the Ash- Ash-Shuruq Tower, a building housing several news organisations, including Reuters, NBC, Fox News, Sky News, Al-Arabiya and Abu Dhabi TV channels in downtown Gaza City was hit by an Israeli missile today. Two journalists, Muhammad As-Susi and Layman Ar-Rezi working for Abu Dhabi were injured in the attack. The IFJ has since the outbreak of the current conflict repeatedly denounced attacks on media by Israel in Gaza which have claimed

five lives of journalists and protested its ban on foreign journalists to enter Gaza.

"This latest attack against the press is irrefutable proof that Israel pursues a clear strategy of intimidating the world media, including by wilfully killing and injuring journalists, into desisting from reporting independently on the conflict," added White. "This is a dangerous departure from universally accepted rules for prosecuting war which must be denounced and resisted."

The IFJ calls on all media organisations with presence in Gaza or information on attacks against the media in the area to contribute to the investigation by sharing information in their possession with IFJ.

January 14, 2009

IFJ Condemns Israeli Hypocrisy over Accused Palestinian Journalists

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has today protested at the charges levelled by Israeli prosecutors against two Palestinians journalists for broadcasting information subject to military censorship.

"We condemn these charges which just prove the hypocrisy and double standards applied by Israel in Gaza," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "Israel uses the law to enforce its military dictate on journalists while it fails to implement the order of the country's highest court allowing media access to Gaza."

According to press reports, the two journalists Hadir Shaheen 34, and Mohammed Sarhan, 26, who worked for Al-Alam TV in Ramallah have been indicted on Tuesday for reporting on the deployment of Israeli soldiers into Gaza without clearance from Israeli censor authorities.

Prosecutors claim that the report, which was broadcast on Arabic news channels, including those available in the Gaza Strip, could have been seen by Hamas fighters.

"These charges deal a serious blow to Israel's claim that the ban in Gaza on foreign media is justified on security grounds," added White. "The real reason is the determined effort by Israel to deny media their independence in reporting on its activities in Gaza. This is a cynical attempt to use media for military purposes and we demand that these charges be dropped and the two journalists released."

January 13, 2009

IFJ Calls on Israel to Release Journalists Arrested in Gaza

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has today condemned the arrest of two Palestinian journalists from Gaza who are detained by Israeli military authorities since 5 January 2009.

"We demand that these journalists who are being unlawfully detained are released immediately," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "Israel has no legitimate reason to detain journalists who are neither on its soil nor involved in fighting in Gaza."

According to media reports, Khadir Shahin, journalist for Al-Alam TV and his producer were arrested by Israeli soldiers on Monday 5 January 2009 and have since been detained in unidentified location. The IFJ has condemned the attack on the building housing media offices including Al-Alam TV last Friday 9 January by Israel's war planes.

"By harassing journalists and media organisations who have escaped the ban on foreign journalists to enter Gaza , Israel makes plain its intention to prevent proper and objective coverage of the conflict in Gaza," added White. "The situation speaks more about unashamed intimidation and manipulation of media than about security consideration on the part of Israel."

January 12, 2009

IFJ Launches Gaza Campaign: Calls for UN Action over Targeting

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) today called on the United Nations to investigate targeting of media by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip and to take action against Israel where it has violated international law and a Security Council resolution on protection of media in conflict zones.

The IFJ has called on all of its affiliates, regional organisations and other journalists' groups in the region, including the Federation of Arab Journalists, to support the call which is part of a number of solidarity actions launched by the IFJ today.

The IFJ is calling for the establishment of an international Gaza Journalists' Defence Committee and has launched an appeal for humanitarian assistance to support the families of media victims. The IFJ says that five media staff have died as a result of Israeli action in Gaza in recent days.

In a letter to all IFJ affiliates, the IFJ announced that a Gaza Safety Fund account has been opened for donations towards further humanitarian aid to the victims of violence in Gaza.

In a letter to Ban-Ki Moon, United Nations Secretary General, IFJ leaders, President Jim Boumelha and General Secretary Aidan White, say: "Israel is violating international law, ignoring its own Supreme Court and showing contempt for the United Nations by defying its obligations under Resolution 1738 to protect journalists in conflict zones."

The IFJ claims that Israeli military have made targeted attacks on media on two specific occasions - on December 28 when Israeli aircraft struck the television station Al Aqsa and on January 9 when there was a double air strike on the Al-Johara Tower in Gaza City, a building was clearly marked as housing media staff and where up 20 news organisations were based.

The IFJ demands that the blockade on foreign media entering Gaza must end and any talks to guarantee a ceasefire and a peaceful solution to the present conflict must include guarantees on the rights of media to move freely and to end all forms of

intimidation of journalists. Initially, if humanitarian corridors are to be created, these must also allow the free movement of journalists, according to IFJ.

January 10, 2009

IFJ Demands End to Targeting as Israelis Strike Media Tower

The International Federation of Journalists has called for the protection of media and journalists to be guaranteed in any talks taking place to end the violence in the Gaza Strip following the bombing on Friday of a building housing news organisations.

The Al-Johara Tower, an eight-storey building in Al-Rimal neighbourhood in Gaza City, was hit twice by Israeli aircraft, even though the building was clearly marked as housing media staff. Up to 20 news organisations work inside the building including Iran's English-language Press TV and Arabic-language network of al-Alam. Satellite transmission equipment on the roof of the building was destroyed and at least one journalist was reported injured.

The IFJ is particularly concerned because the coordinates for the building were provided to the Israeli military and lighting on the roof clearly identifies the building.

“This latest attack confirms the fear that media inside Gaza are becoming the targets of Israeli forces,” said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. “It is time for the international community to condemn this targeting and to ensure that any agreement to end hostilities will also take media and journalists out of the firing line.”

The IFJ is supporting its local affiliate the Palestine Journalists Syndicate, which has also protested over this attack, which came at the end of a week when another Palestinian journalist was reported killed - the fourth media victim of recent Israeli military action in Gaza.

Despite an Israeli Supreme Court ruling ordering the government to allow a limited pool of journalists to enter Gaza, the army continues to block entry of foreign reporters. The IFJ says this is an attempt to manipulate media reporting of the conflict. “The media have become part of the battleground and journalists are ever more at risk,” said White. “The targeting of journalists is a scandalous violation of human rights and must be stopped.”

January 9, 2009

Gaza Journalist Killed, IFJ Calls for Protest Over Media Blockade

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has called on the world of journalism to raise its voice in protest over Israeli government pressure on media trying to cover the Gaza conflict. The Government has imposed a blockade on the world's media trying to report on the Gaza crisis.

The IFJ call comes as another Palestinian journalist was reported killed - the fourth victim of recent Israeli military action in Gaza. Eyhab Al Wahidi, who worked as a cameraman for the Palestinian Broadcast Corporation in Gaza, was killed with his

wife and mother in law yesterday when Israeli troops shelled their home in Gaza city. The family children were injured.

"The media crisis in Gaza has become intolerable," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "The systematic manipulation and control of media trying to report on Gaza and the casualties being sustained inside the territory require a concerted response from the world's media."

Despite an Israeli Supreme Court ruling ordering the government to allow a limited pool of journalists to enter Gaza, the army continues to block entry. Yesterday, two Israeli channels and the BBC were permitted to briefly accompany Israeli ground forces, but there is no hint that the government will permit journalists unfettered access to Gaza.

According to media reports, journalists for most television networks are broadcasting from a hill outside Sderot, and relying on Gazan journalists to serve as their eyes and ears. Meanwhile, Israel's sophisticated communications operation provides beleaguered media staff with contacts, fact books full of charts and statistics, tours of the south of Israel and interviews with the Israeli victims of rocket attacks from Gaza.

"There is a cynical attempt to ensure that media tell the story from the Israeli side only," said White. "The truth cannot be told unless journalists are free to move, to talk with everyone involved and to see with their own eyes what is happening on the ground."

The IFJ says that legitimate security concerns are being raised, particularly related to the safety of media staff. "But this should not be used as an excuse to keep journalists from doing their work," said White. "Media must be free to judge the risks for themselves and not be constrained. When one side takes control of the message, truth-telling becomes overwhelmed by propaganda."

January 7, 2009

IFJ Condemns Killings and Backs Media Protests over Israeli Actions

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) today condemned the killing of a cameraman in Gaza as a result of an air strike carried out by Israeli forces in Gaza.

Basel Faraj, who worked as a cameraman for the Algerian TV network ENTV and the Palestine Broadcast Production Company, was wounded as a result of an Israeli air strike on 27 December. He died yesterday evening. He was filming in Gaza with reporters Mohamed Madi and Mohamed Al Tanany and Morocco Channel 2 cameraman, Khaled Abu Shammala all of whom were injured in the attack.

Basel is the second journalist to die from injuries in the recent Gaza conflict. Hamza Shahin, a photographer with Shehab News Agency, died on 26 December from wounds sustained in an earlier Israeli air attack on 7 December. Journalists have been in the firing line since the beginning of the Israeli military operation.

The Palestine Journalists Syndicate (PJS) says that Israeli forces have targeted vehicles and journalists who were clearly identified with "Press" or "TV" markings.

The PJS has organised demonstrations in the West Bank town of Ramallah today to protest over the attacks on media and to show solidarity with journalists and media inside Gaza. The IFJ has protested at the destruction of the offices of Al Aqsa Television on December 28 by Israeli fighter planes and called for Israel to open up Gaza to foreign correspondents in line with an order from Israeli judges.

"We strongly support our colleagues in Palestine as they speak out against Israeli attacks on journalists and media outlets,' said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary." Israel is making a mockery of its status as a democratic country by violating international law, ignoring its own Supreme Court and showing contempt for the United Nations by defying its obligations under Resolution 1738 to protect journalists in conflict zones."

January 6, 2009

IFJ Slams Israel Over Targeting and "Cynical Violations" of Rights

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) today accused Israel of targeting Palestinian media while continuing its ban on foreign journalists from entering Gaza to cover the conflict.

"Each day that passes we see cynical violations of press freedom and the rights of journalists trying desperately to cover the tragic events unfolding in Gaza," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "We have reports that media inside Gaza are being targeted by Israeli soldiers while those outside are being kept at bay."

Yesterday, a compromise reached between the authorities and the Jerusalem-based Foreign Press Association to allow a selected group of foreign journalists into Gaza was withdrawn, over-ruling an Israeli court order in favour of opening the blockade of the area to give media access. The IFJ says that any arrangement to allow access should not be controlled by the Israeli military.

The Palestine Journalists Syndicate (PJS) has also expressed concern over reports of the arrest and detention by Israeli military forces of Khezr Shahin, a reporter for Al-Alam television. "The continued ban on journalists travelling into Gaza to cover the conflict is outrageous, particularly given that the courts in Israel have said they should be allowed in," said White. "But reports of targeting those who are on the spot add to our concern that there is a policy in place to deny access to the full story and to intimidate reporters that are already there."

January 5, 2009

Media Ban a Recipe for Censorship, Ignorance and Fear, Says IFJ

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) says the Israeli ban on foreign journalists from entering Gaza to cover the conflict is a dangerous violation of press freedom that adds to "ignorance, uncertainty and fear" in the region.

The IFJ says that the presence of independent reporters on the ground is needed to ensure that there are no flagrant abuses of human rights by combatants. The IFJ's protest comes as the global humanitarian agency Human Rights Watch (HRW) called for rights monitors as well as journalists to be allowed into Gaza, a move that could help save lives.

"The Israeli ban on foreign news media from Gaza since December 27 raises concerns that there is a systematic attempt to prevent scrutiny of actions by the Israeli military," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "The eyes of the world are on Gaza, but Israel is trying to censor the news by keeping the media at bay."

The IFJ says that Israeli claims the ban was imposed because it cannot guarantee the safety of journalists is untenable. "Few news people take this seriously given that Israel has already shown its contempt for international law by its targeted military strike on an unarmed television station at the outset of the conflict," said White.

For the past two months, when the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas broke down, Israel has restricted access to Gaza for foreign journalists. None has been allowed entry since the current military campaign began. The world's media are largely dependent upon coverage provided by local Palestinian freelance staff, many of whom are denied formal press accreditation by Israel and have no freedom to move in the region. Israeli journalists themselves are denied access to Gaza, say human rights groups, because of the government's policy of prohibiting citizens from entering Gaza.

The IFJ is concerned that restriction of access and movement may contribute to unbalanced reporting as journalists are unable to report from all conflict-hit areas.

The IFJ is supporting efforts by the Jerusalem-based Foreign Correspondents Association to get journalist's access to Gaza, but is insisting that there should be no controlled access organised and supervised by the Israeli authorities.

"It is not for one side to dictate who goes into the area and in what circumstances," said White. "Journalists should be allowed to travel and work freely without monitoring by the military."

December 29, 2008

IFJ Condemns Killing of Photographer as Gaza Media Face New Risks

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) today warned that journalists and media staff face serious risks during Israeli military operations the Gaza strip after a local photographer died of wounds sustained in an air attack two weeks ago.

"Israel's ongoing attacks on Gaza present a serious risk to security of journalists and media staff," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "The whole world is watching and journalists trying to cover the story are inevitably in the firing line."

According to media reports, Hamza Shahin, a photographer with Shehab News Agency, died on Friday last week. He had been wounded in an Israeli air attack on 7 December in northern Gaza.

The current conflict in Gaza takes place at a time when Israel continues to deny access to foreign journalists into Gaza putting even more pressure on the local reporters and camera staff who supply foreign networks. The IFJ is particularly concerned that journalists will be further exposed as they seek to report from locations which are likely to come under attack.

"The pressure on journalists is intense, "said White." Israel should allow foreign journalists into Gaza and must at the same time ensure its military activities comply with international law, especially United Nations Resolution 1738 on the protection of journalists and media staff." Yesterday the IFJ complained that Israel breached International Law with its military strike on the Hamas television station Al Aqsa, a civilian target.

December 28, 2008

IFJ Condemns Israel for Strike on Television during Gaza Blitz

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has condemned Israel over an attack on a television station in Gaza during its military offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Israeli fighter planes destroyed the offices of Al Aqsa Television which was targeted early on Sunday. The station is used by Hamas and is hostile to Israel in its partisan coverage of the region. Its studio building was destroyed and one cameraman was reported as injured, but the station remained on the air with a mobile unit.

"Once again, Israel shows contempt for international law, which forbids attacks on media installations, even when they are instruments of propaganda," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. "Putting media people in harm's way does not advance one inch the cause of security as it only hardens attitudes and undermines Israel's claim to be the region's leading democracy."

The IFJ and other press freedom advocates have consistently condemned attacks on unarmed media installations which are not being used for military purposes and which are protected under international law. It has previously condemned Israel for attacking premises of Palestine Broadcasting on the West Bank and has criticised the US for assaults on media in Iraq.

"The fact that Al Aqsa Television broadcasts material which Israel finds offensive is no excuse for military strikes on unarmed civilians," said White. "This type of assault shows that when it comes to its own military and political agenda Israel is willing to abandon its responsibilities under international law."

Appendix 2 – Accounts from Gaza

Nabil Faraj, Father of cameraman
Basil Faraj killed on 27 December 2008:

Nabil Faraj. Photo: Anne Poulsen/IMS

Basil Faraj, aged 22, had only been working as a cameraman for 10 days, when he on 27 December 2008 left home to join three colleagues on a feature story about a Moroccan family living in Gaza City.



While filming they suddenly heard a series of explosions. They had no idea what was happening but they decided to leave and find out. They got into their car and had only driven for a few seconds, when a F16 rocket hit a building just as they were driving by.

Then they saw smoke coming out of the building and they realised that it could be dangerous. They decided to turn around but before they were able to turn the car, the explosion came. As one of Basil's colleagues described, it felt like a tsunami of stone and glass and smoke pouring down on them. The car was completely destroyed.

Whereas his colleagues were able to get out of the car and escape the scene, Basil was seriously wounded. He had been sitting behind the driver on the seat nearest to the building, and he was hit all over the head with shrapnel and glass. It was not possible to save his life.

Basil Faraj was still studying, but according to his father, he was so eager to start working that he had asked to become an intern with a media house in Gaza City. He had worked for only 10 days, when he was killed.

“Basil was obsessed with journalism. He wanted to be a cameraman. He looked at it as humanitarian work arguing that a picture was 1000 times stronger than a bullet. He used to say that media people were the real soldiers and that was why they deserved protection,” accounts Nabil Faraj.

- Anne Poulsen

Appendix 3 – Media Casualties in Gaza

(Jan.2) – Agence France Press photographer **Abbas Mourni** was injured by the Israeli forces. Mourni said that he was wounded during his coverage of a Palestinian march near Kalandia checkpoint, north of Jerusalem, by shrapnel from a bullet in the left leg; he was taken to the Sheikh Zayed Hospital in Ramallah to receive treatment.

(Jan.3) - Aqsa TV cameraman **Omar Abdel-Hafiz Silawi** (28 years) was killed in Beit Lahiya city (GS) after Israeli forces shelled Dr. Ibrahim Makadmeh mosque. His colleague Ibrahim Muslim said that they were covering the Israeli bombing in that area throughout the day, in particular, Kamal Adwan field hospital and the nearby areas. Silawi was filming and transferred videos to the place where the TV was broadcasting, then he transferred his wife to the hospital to give birth, then returned to take his camera and went to the mosque, which is 100m away from the hospital, and when it was bombed, he was seriously injured. "When I saw him on a stretcher sometimes I was filming him and sometimes helping them to race him to the hospital," said his colleague. "I was crying. They tried to treat him but without results. Our comfort is that his wife gave birth safely to a son."

(Jan.7) - Algerian TV assistant cameraman **Basil Ibrahim Fara**(j 22 years) died due injuries he had sustained to the head during the Israeli attack on 27 December 2008.

(Jan.8) - Palestinian Public TV cameraman **Ihab Jamal Wahidi** (33 years), was killed when Israeli forces shelled the Tower of doctors in Gaza city. His wife Ihsan Abu-Jaber Naja said that she was standing with her husband and her mother Ruqaya Abu Naja on the seventh floor apartment balcony. She said, "We were talking about general matters, when suddenly I heard my husband saying "look" and I saw a shell heading towards us." The shell hit her mother directly, and Ihab was killed immediately and fell from the seventh floor onto the ground.

(Jan.8) – Editor for Saudi Ekhparyah TV **Manar Shalolah** (26 years) was slightly injured on the head when Al-Jawharah (Jewel) tower was bombed by an Israeli airplanes.

(Jan.9) - Alwan Radio broadcaster **A'la Hammad Murtaja** (25 years) was killed when his house in the Zeitoun neighborhood in Gaza city was hit by an Israeli mortar. His mother was seriously injured in the incident.

(Jan.9) Maan News Agency photographer **Khalil Ryashwas** was wounded by Israeli soldiers who shot him on the leg in Jayyous village (Qalqilya-WB).

(Jan.9) - Associated Press photographer **Mohammed Muheisen** was injured by the Israeli forces while covering a demonstration near the Qalandya checkpoint north of Jerusalem. Muheisen said that he was hit by a gas bomb in the chest under the heart, and lost consciousness after the impact caused by inhalation of large quantities of gas. He was transferred to the Sheikh Zayed hospital in Ramallah, where the doctors diagnosed a fracture in a rib.

(Jan.15) – Abu Dhabi TV cameraman Mohamed **Sobhi al Sosi** (33 years) and montage technician **Ayman Yousef Al-Rouzi** (33 years) were injured in the

bombing of the Al-Shoruoq tower in Gaza city. Al -Rouzi was injured in the head, and Al-Sosi in his left hand. They were both transferred to Shefa hospital for medical treatment.

The Mission was informed that two other journalists were killed, unconnected with their professional duties. It appears that they died while on active service for Hamas.

(Source: Palestinian Centre for Development and Media freedoms- Mada)
