



# UNITED NATIONS

## Press Release

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**HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS,  
ENDING VISIT TO ISRAEL AND OCCUPIED  
PALESTINIAN TERRITORY,  
SAYS CIVILIANS BEARING BRUNT OF  
VIOLATIONS**

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23 November 2006

### Louise Arbour Says Civilians Are Bearing Brunt of Violations

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said in a statement released on 23 November that Palestinian and Israeli civilians were the primary victims of the alarming deprivation of human rights in the region.

Speaking at the end of a five-day visit to the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel, the High Commissioner said her talks with both Palestinians and Israelis affected by the violence made apparent "their profound sense of frustration and abandonment, including a perception that the international community is not doing enough to protect them".

The High Commissioner said the situation was particularly acute in the occupied Palestinian territory.

"I left Gaza with a sense that the right of its people to physical integrity --their right to life -- was particularly imperiled: Beit Hanoun is only one case in many", she said, referring to the incident in which 19 Palestinian civilians were killed by Israeli shelling on 8 November.

"While in the West Bank", she continued, "I was struck by the severe impact that the Barrier and the system of checkpoints, road blocks, trenches and earth mounds was having on family life and economic life, indeed, on the quality of life: in short, on human dignity".

The High Commissioner recalled that she had also impressed upon Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority to exhaust every legitimate means of law enforcement -- and be seen to do so -- to ensure an end to the firing of Qassam missiles and to bring those who launch them to justice. The use of Qassam missiles, an inherently directionless weapon, "is done only with the intent to kill and to spread fear without discrimination", she said. "As such they are in breach of international humanitarian law and their use must cease immediately".

The High Commissioner said a lasting political solution grounded in the realisation of the Palestinians' right to self-determination and in the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to live in safety within internationally recognised, secure borders was required. In the meantime, however, human rights cannot be put on hold.

"What can be done immediately is for discussion of this crisis, and more importantly action to address it, to be re-positioned within a framework of international human rights law", she said.

The High Commissioner recommended ensuring appropriate redress in situations in which there has been the lethal use of force, saying a system of accountability available to Palestinians allowing for investigations which are law-based, independent, transparent and accessible was imperative.

Among other recommendations, the High Commissioner said Palestinians need to be able to enjoy their right to freedom of movement, which is currently seriously compromised within the West Bank in particular, but also between the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian access to Jerusalem also remains of particular concern.

And, in addition to the particular responsibilities that rest on Israel as an occupying power, it must discharge its obligations without discrimination towards all individuals in Israel, including its Palestinian citizens.

As for the international community, she added, it should at all times advocate the respect of international law, ensuring that treaties, conventions and agreements are respected by all, and that the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Barrier is used as a framework for the implementation of the rule of law.

Ms. Arbour said another important area was the plight of those imprisoned, captured or otherwise detained as a consequence of the crisis. "It is vital that here, too, the rights of these individuals and appropriate access to them, are fully respected".

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