**Hamas’ Use of Human Shields is a War Crime**

IDF Blog

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[https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/http://www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/07/14/hamas-use-human-shields-war-crime/](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/http%3A//www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/07/14/hamas-use-human-shields-war-crime/)

**International law explicitly forbids directing civilians to shield military objectives from attack.**

The terrorist organization Hamas deliberately uses Palestinian civilians as human shields, and has a [long history](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/https%3A/www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vHDyuSTneA) of doing so. Hamas hopes to achieve two goals by using human shields: to deter IDF attacks on legitimate military targets, and to exploit any incidental harm that is caused as a result of IDF military activity.

Hamas’ use of human shields is a clear and deliberate violation of international law. Under the law of armed conflict, the presence of the civilian population cannot be used to render certain points immune from military operations, or to shield one’s own military operations. International law also explicitly forbids directing the civilian population to shield military objectives from attack.

Hamas’ actions in this regard are clear violations of international law and are war crimes.

Hamas’ use of human shields not only makes the IDF’s efforts to reduce civilian harm more difficult, but is also potentially lethal for civilians in Gaza. Despite the IDF’s best efforts to avoid incidental harm, the increased presence of civilians in areas of planned IDF activity raises the risk of harm to the civilian population.

Hamas knows very well that the IDF does everything that it can to avoid civilian casualties. That is why in recent days Hamas issued messages on its television, radio, and social media platforms to ignore the IDF’s warnings of impending strikes and to remain in their homes.

[EMBEDDED VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/UXZEzbT0H1s>]

“We call on our Palestinian people, particularly the residents of northwest Gaza, not to obey what is written in the pamphlets distributed by the Israeli occupation army,” [Hamas announced](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/https%3A/www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zm09uRDdzto&feature=youtu.be) through official media channels on July 13. “We call on them to remain in their homes and disregard the demands to leave, however serious the threat may be.” The Hamas Interior Ministry has also called on the residents of northern Gaza to [stay in their homes](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/https%3A/twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/488077694471385088) and ignore IDF flyers, distributing its message through official Hamas TV.

Despite Hamas’ widespread use of human shields, the IDF continues to make [substantial efforts](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/http%3A/www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/07/11/pinpoint-strikes-targeting-terrorists-avoiding-civilians/) to minimize harm to the civilian population during its military operations. The IDF does this in a number of ways, including by [dropping leaflets](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/http%3A/idfonline.tumblr.com/post/91638681107/we-have-begun-dropping-leaflets-above-northern) warning of planned military operations, making [personalized phone calls](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/http%3A/youtu.be/7yvQz3SQxGI) to buildings designated for attack as legitimate military targets, and in some cases, releasing low-explosive munitions to the top of a building as a warning of an impending strike.

Many times, the IDF has [called off airstrikes](https://web.archive.org/web/20140806021918/https%3A/www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtL5QitoSC0) after identifying civilians gathering as human shields in the vicinity of the military objective.

[EMBEDDED VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/PuL-OA84p54>]

The IDF will continue to conduct its operations in full accordance with international law, including by attacking only legitimate military targets, and will continue its efforts to minimize harm to Palestinian civilians.