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| xxxxxxxxxx | **UN HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERTS CALL FOR IMMEDIATE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS  IN MIDDLE EAST CRISIS** | xxxxxxxxxx |

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| 2 January 2009  *Asma Jahangir, Chairperson of the coordinating body for independent United Nations human rights experts (known as "Special Procedures") issued the following statement today:*  "The Coordination Committee of Special Procedures is deeply alarmed at the continuing violence in Gaza. We stress that international human rights law continues to apply and that it imposes binding obligations on all parties in situations of armed conflict.   We call on all parties to immediately cease all actions that result in civilian casualties, or put them at great risk. Both air strikes by Israeli Government forces and rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel are resulting in inexcusable loss of life and placing the civilian populations in the affected areas in extreme danger.   The use of disproportionate force by Israel and the lack of regard for the life of civilians on both sides cannot be justified by the actions of the other party. They constitute clear violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law.   We are particularly concerned at the impact of the current violence and destruction of vital infrastructure on the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. We call on all parties to immediately ensure full access to humanitarian actors and supplies and enable them to carry out their work of distributing food, treating the sick and injured, and guaranteeing the provision of essential energy and sanitation.   Independent human rights monitoring, including by the various UN Special Procedures, is particularly crucial in these circumstances which result in an exceptionally broad range of human rights violations." |