

Statement on the Situation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect welcomes today's temporary humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and regrets that armed hostilities now appear to have resumed.

Attacks on civilians and civilian property in Gaza and Israel violate international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes. The distinction between military and civilian targets is central to international humanitarian law and must be adhered to. As a matter of international law, war crimes can be committed during the course of armed conflict occurring across or within state borders, and whether or not a formal state of war has been declared.

Since mid-June Palestinian armed groups operating in Gaza have launched more than a thousand rockets into Israel, with most aimed towards residential areas. One Israeli civilian has been killed and more than twenty have been wounded. These rocket attacks are indiscriminate and are fired with the deliberate intention of harming civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure.

In declared retaliation for these rocket attacks the Israeli Defense Forces appear to have imposed collective punishment upon the people of Gaza, with more than a week of sustained airstrikes killing at least 160 civilians and wounding 1,500 people. At least 44 children have been killed and more than 430 injured. More than 1,600 homes have been destroyed and 79 schools damaged. The UN estimates at least 22,600 Palestinian civilians are now sheltering in UN facilities in Gaza.

The Israeli government and Hamas must uphold their responsibility to protect civilians from war crimes, in keeping with global commitments made at the UN World Summit in 2005.

Dr. Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, said: "The international community needs to focus on protecting vulnerable civilians from both sides of this conflict. Attacks on civilians will not bring peace or justice to either Israelis or Palestinians. Escalation which could result in further war crimes must be avoided at all costs."

On 12 July the UN Security Council called for an immediate restoration of the November 2012 ceasefire. Today's temporary humanitarian ceasefire provided an opportunity for both sides to negotiate an end to the current crisis in Gaza. Both the Israeli government and Hamas should heed the Security Council's call and immediately halt all attacks on civilians.