

UN calls for probe as Israeli army accused of killing unarmed Palestinians

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Israeli soldiers patrol a district in Gaza City [File: Yossi Zeliger/Reuters]

Geneva, December 21 (RHC)-- The United Nations human rights office has called for an independent inquiry into allegations that Israeli forces "summarily executed" at least 11 Palestinian men in Gaza in

what it called “a possible war crime.”

“The Israeli authorities must immediately institute an independent, thorough and effective investigation into these allegations, and if found to be substantiated, those responsible must be brought to justice and measures implemented to prevent any such serious violations from recurring,” said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in a statement on Wednesday.

Al Jazeera spoke to several witnesses to Tuesday’s raid during which Israeli troops allegedly surrounded and stormed a residential building, going floor to floor to separate the men from the women and children, and then shooting dead 11 of the men in front of their family members. The men were in their 20s and 30s, survivors said.

“They saw us, men and their wives and children. My brother-in-law tried to speak and explain all in the house are civilians, but they shot him dead,” one survivor told Al Jazeera of the attack on families who were sheltering in al-Adwa building in Gaza City’s Remal neighborhood.

The soldiers “forced their way into every home, killed the men and detained the women and children. We do not know their whereabouts. They did the same on every floor. All women were rounded up in one room. By the time they reached us on the sixth floor, they started shooting all men,” a woman said, adding that her father-in-law and son were shot and killed instantly.

Survivors also said that the Israeli soldiers also attacked the women and children after ordering them into a room in the residential block also known as Annan building.

“The Israeli soldiers rounded up all the women in one room, then fired three mortar shells on us, then kept shooting their machine guns at us,” a wounded woman said.

“I was hit with a bullet in my hand, my daughter in her head, my younger daughter was killed and my son is blind. My husband was executed in cold blood. All my other daughters suffered severe injuries, broken bones and flesh torn open. We were all hit by bullets or shrapnel,” she added.

Analyst Tamer Qarmout, an assistant professor at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, welcomed the UN call for an investigation into the “unlawful killings”, telling Al Jazeera that the key issue is how such probes are going to be conducted.

None of the entities that could investigate alleged Israeli crimes against Palestinians is currently allowed into the Gaza Strip, Qarmout noted.

Other witnesses recalled that the men were forced to strip before being shot, and one man said that “even young boys were not spared. They were all battered and bludgeoned. They suffered broken bones and are in hospital.”

There has been no comment from the Israeli military on the attack.

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