

UN says cases of rape and sexual violence against Gaza women by Israeli troops is abhorrent

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Wounded Palestinians arrive for treatment at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital after Israeli bombardment in Deir Balah in the central Gaza Strip, March 9, 2024. (Photo by AFP)

Geneva, March 26 (RHC)-- The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, Reem al-Salem, has expressed her deep concern about the increasing cases of rape committed by Israeli soldiers against Palestinian women at the al-Shifa Hospital in the Gaza Strip.

“It is abhorrent that such reports of sexual violence continue unabated – not to mention that this is but one of multiple forms of violence that Palestinian women are subjected to on the basis of being Palestinian and being women,” Salem wrote in a post published on X social media platform.

“Rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide! It must stop.” On March 18, heavily armed Israeli forces stormed the al-Shifa Hospital and fired at thousands of patients, and medical staff, and displaced thousands of civilians inside the facility.

Jamila al-Hissi, a Palestinian woman who was trapped in the hospital for six days before she managed to finally get out, has told the Qatar-based Al Jazeera news channel that Israeli soldiers there had “raped women, kidnapped women, executed women, and pulled dead bodies from under the rubble to unleash their dogs on them.”

Eyewitnesses to Israel’s week-long raid on the al-Shifa Hospital and its vicinity in Gaza City say they saw the regime’s armored vehicles running over bodies and ambulances at the medical complex. Al-Shifa used to be the Gaza Strip’s largest hospital before the current conflict started. It is now one of the few partially operational healthcare facilities in the north.

Israel first raided the hospital in November. The Israeli military stormed the complex after it claimed “senior Hamas terrorists” were using the facility to “conduct and promote terrorist activity.” Hamas rejects the claim.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza said at the time that about 3,000 people were inside the hospital seeking refuge and that those attempting to leave were being targeted by snipers and fire from helicopters.

According to the UN, 155 health facilities in the Gaza Strip have been damaged since early October.

Israel has killed at least 32,330 Palestinians, most of them women and children, and injured more than 74,600 people in the besieged Palestinian territory since October 7, 2023.

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