

UN rights chief warns situation in West Bank dramatically deteriorating



Israeli occupation troops raid West Bank

United Nations, June 21 (RHC)-- The top United Nations human rights official has warned of the worsening situation for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the “unconscionable death and suffering” in the Gaza Strip.

“The situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is dramatically deteriorating,” Volker Turk told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Tuesday.

He said 528 Palestinians, 133 of them children, were killed by Israeli military forces or settlers from the start of the current war on Gaza in October to June 15, “in many cases raising serious concerns of unlawful killings.”

In the same period, 23 Israelis were killed in clashes with Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel, including eight members of security forces, according to the UN’s high commissioner for human rights.

Two weeks ago, Turk said people in the West Bank were being “subjected to day after day of unprecedented bloodshed.”

He spoke as the Israeli military arrested at least five Palestinians during the storming of several towns and villages in Ramallah and el-Bireh governorate in the West Bank, according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa, which also reported a settler attack on Palestinian farmland in the village of Yasuf, east of Salfit.

Overnight, Israeli forces arrested dozens of Palestinians in Qusrah near Nablus, also in the West Bank, taking them to a school where they were held and interrogated, Wafa reported.

Israeli forces have been rounding up an average of 35 Palestinians a day since the war started, with 9,112 Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jails as of June 1st, nearly double the number of Palestinians jailed on October 1st, according to tallies by Palestinian prisoners groups.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk also told the 47-member council that he was “appalled” by the disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law in Gaza, where “there has been unconscionable death and suffering.”

“More than 120,000 people in Gaza, overwhelmingly women and children, have been killed or injured since October 7 as a result of the intensive Israeli offensives,” the official said. “Since Israel escalated its operations into Rafah in early May, almost one million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced yet again while aid delivery and humanitarian access deteriorated further.”

More than 37,000 people have been killed and more than 85,400 injured in Israel’s war on Gaza since October 7, the Ministry of Health in the Palestinian enclave said on Tuesday. The revised death toll in Israel from the Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel stands at 1,139 with dozens of people still held captive in Gaza.

Turk said he was “extremely worried about the escalating situation” between Israel and the Lebanese group Hezbollah as at least 401 people in Lebanon have been reportedly killed in the fighting, including paramedics and journalists.

More than 90,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon, and more than 60,000 have been displaced in Israel with 25 Israeli fatalities, he said.

Israel’s permanent mission to the UN in Geneva accused Turk of “completely omitting the cruelty and barbarity of terrorism” in his address to the council.

Turk additionally said global conflicts killed three times as many children and twice as many women in 2023 than in the previous year as the total number of civilian deaths rose by 72 percent.

Warring parties were increasingly “pushing beyond boundaries of what is acceptable – and legal”, he told the council. “Killings and injuries of civilians have become a daily occurrence. ... Children shot at. Hospitals bombed. Heavy artillery launched on entire communities. All along with hateful, divisive and dehumanising rhetoric.”

As he pointed to other conflicts – including in Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Syria – he noted that funding to help the growing numbers of people in need was dwindling.

“As of the end of May 2024, the gap between humanitarian funding requirements and available resources stands at \$40.8 billion,” Turk said, in contrast with “almost \$2.5 trillion in global military expenditure in 2023.”

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