

UN commission finds Israel guilty of “extermination,” “crimes against humanity,” killing Palestinians and Israeli hostages

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The Israeli government and military have committed systematic “crimes against humanity,” including “extermination,” during their eight-month-long assault on Gaza, a key United Nations commission found in a report published Wednesday.

The report is the first in-depth investigation by the United Nations into the events that have happened since October 7 and is based on detailed interviews with victims and witnesses. The three-person commission is led by Navi Pillay, a former United Nations human rights chief.

The commission concluded that the Israeli military and government “committed the war crimes of starvation as a method of warfare; murder or willful killing; intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects; forcible transfer; sexual violence; outrages upon personal dignity; and [sexual and gender-based violence] amounting to torture or inhuman and cruel treatment.”

It found that Israel was responsible for crimes against humanity. According to the report “extermination; murder; gender persecution targeting Palestinian men and boys; forcible transfer; and torture and inhuman and cruel treatment were committed.”

This report lends further weight to the charges by Karim Khan, the lead prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant are guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

While the 2023-24 Gaza genocide shares elements of previous Israeli assaults on Gaza, it is of a totally different magnitude and intensity. The report asserts that “Israel’s military operation and attack in Gaza has been the longest, largest and bloodiest since 1948. It has caused immense damage and loss of life.”

It notes that “hostilities between 2005 and 2023 resulted in less than a tenth of the fatalities since October 7.” It

adds: “The Commission has also observed an increasing trend in the number of fatalities of women and children compared with previous hostilities.”

The massive civilian death toll is due to the fact that, in the words of the commission, the “Israeli government has given [the Israeli military] blanket authorization to target civilian locations widely and indiscriminately in the Gaza Strip.”

The systematic mass bombing of Palestinian civilians is accompanied by a deliberate effort to starve the population of Gaza into submission in a form of collective punishment.

The report concludes that “Israel has used starvation as a method of war, affecting the entire population of the Gaza Strip for decades to come, with particularly negative consequences for children.” This is a war crime.

The report concludes:

At the time of writing this report, children have already died due to acute malnutrition and dehydration. Through the siege it imposed, Israel has weaponized the withholding of life-sustaining necessities, cutting off supplies of water, food, electricity, fuel, and other essential supplies, including humanitarian assistance. This constitutes collective punishment and reprisal against the civilian population, both of which are clear violations of [international humanitarian law].

The report documents the systematic blocking of food, water and electricity from entering the Gaza Strip, which was justified in the proclamation by Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant of “a complete siege... no

electricity, no water, no food, no fuel. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly.”

The commission noted statements by Israeli authorities intending “to hold the population of the Gaza Strip hostage to achieve political and military objectives,” actions that aim to carry out “the collective punishment of the entire population for the actions of a few, a clear violation of international humanitarian law.”

While the US and Israeli media have repeatedly asserted that Hamas forces that took part in the October 7 attack on Israel committed mass rapes, the report concludes that the commission “has not been able to independently verify such allegations,” and that it “found some specific allegations to be false, inaccurate, or contradictory with other evidence or statements and discounted these from its assessment.”

Critically, the report also documents the Israeli military’s stand-down during October 7 and the deliberate targeting of Israeli civilians by the Israeli military that day.

The commission found that the Israeli military’s response to the October 7 attack was “significantly delayed and, in many places, totally inadequate.” This was despite the fact that the Israeli military was in possession of Hamas’s detailed battle plans for the attack. On the day of the attack, Israeli forces were deliberately withdrawn from the border.

Once Israeli forces arrived, they began attacking Israeli hostages and other civilians. The report states:

The Commission documented one statement by an ISF tank crew, confirming that the crew had applied the Hannibal Directive by shooting at a vehicle which they suspected was transporting abducted ISF [Israeli security forces] soldiers.

The Hannibal Directive aims to prevent the capture of Israelis by enemy forces, even at the cost of their lives, and implies that the IDF should kill Israelis rather than allow them to fall into the hands of Hamas.

The report continues:

The Commission also verified information indicating that, in at least two other cases, ISF had likely applied the Hannibal Directive, resulting in the killing of up to 14 Israeli civilians. One

woman was killed by ISF helicopter fire while being abducted from Nir Oz to Gaza by militants. In another case, the Commission found that Israeli tank fire killed some or all of the 13 civilian hostages held in a house in Be’eri.

The commission concluded:

Israeli authorities failed to protect civilians in southern Israel on almost every front. This included failing to swiftly deploy sufficient security forces to protect civilians and evacuate them from civilian locations on 7 October. In several locations, ISF applied the so-called “Hannibal Directive” and killed at least 14 Israeli civilians.

The report notes: “Statements made by Israeli officials reflected policy and practice of inflicting widespread destruction, killing large numbers of civilians, and forcible transfer.”

This report makes clear that despite a systematic slander campaign by the entire US political establishment and media, led by the Biden White House, ongoing mass demonstrations against the Gaza genocide are motivated not by antisemitism but by opposition to an immense violation of international law.

The perpetrators of this massive war crime are not merely in Israel, they are in Washington. The Biden administration has systematically funded, armed and politically supported the genocide. It has provided over 100 separate arms shipments to Israel and defended every one of Israel’s deliberate massacres of civilians, including last weekend’s Nuseirat Massacre that killed 274 people.



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