



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 7

### Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

## **Written statement\* submitted by Every Casualty Worldwide, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 January 2024]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## Analysis of Casualty Records of the Gaza Crisis

Multiple organisations – civil society, UN, and state-led – have documented casualties in Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) for decades. However, the lack of global understanding of the principles and practice of casualty recording means valuable research is frequently doubted or dismissed. In other cases, unreliable data and unverified details circulate and fuel retaliation. In both situations, attention which should be focused on addressing urgent humanitarian needs is instead diverted to ill-informed and unnecessary debate over specific figures and incidents.

The current situation in Gaza makes clear the importance of consistent, transparent and verifiable casualty records. We urge all parties involved in documenting casualties in OPT and Israel to adhere to the ECC Standards for Casualty Recording published in 2016. Universal adherence to and recognition of these Standards would ensure the reliability of all casualty records produced – not only in Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) but globally – and would counter harmful mis- and dis-information.

All parties to armed conflict have an obligation under international humanitarian law to search for and record details of the dead, endeavour to identify them, dispose of their remains respectfully, and to respect the right of families to know the fate of their relatives. They must also mark and maintain gravesites.

States also have casualty recording obligations under international human rights law. The Human Rights Committee has clarified that the Right to Life creates an obligation on states to investigate all possible violations of the right to life, transparently and effectively. This includes any killing attributable to a state agent, wherever it occurs, including in situations of armed conflict or generalised violence. The Israeli government and military do not appear to be upholding this obligation.

According to an article published in Israeli news magazine Mekomit on 24 January, IDF sources told reporters that bomb damage assessments, which should identify how many civilians had been killed, were frequently skipped after airstrikes ‘to save time’. The same sources said that the IDF had no independent statistics on civilian deaths in Gaza and relied on figures from Gaza’s Health Ministry for its internal intelligence briefings. Although the Israeli government has publicly disputed these figures, the sources say that Israeli intelligence services had assessed the Health Ministry’s casualty data and found it reliable.

Airwars – a member of the Casualty Recorders Network - has been documenting civilian harm in major conflicts worldwide for almost a decade, including Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Somalia, Libya, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the first month of military operations following 7 October 2023, Airwars identified 1,067 incidents of harm to civilians in Gaza. Of these, 235 incidents occurred in the first week. This scale of civilian harm is four times higher than Airwars has ever recorded previously, in any month of any conflict, in the past decade.

As of 25 January 2024, Airwars has published details of more than 200 incidents which have gone through a systematic five-step review process. Based on this small sample (representing 10-20% of the total caseload), Airwars has conducted a comparative analysis with casualty data from other recent modern battles, such as the Battle of Raqqa. Results indicate both that more civilians are dying per strike in Gaza than in other such conflicts, and that there are more cases with higher numbers of casualties than in any other conflict. Airwars has already identified at least four incidents within this small sample where more than 50 civilians were reportedly killed. A quarter of incidents reviewed include reports of more than 10 fatalities. Across other conflicts Airwars has documented, the proportion of incidents with more than ten fatalities is closer to 10-15%.

These cases also include 1,532 names of civilians identified by Airwars researchers. Airwars has been systematically matching these names with the list of names published by the Ministry of Health on October 26th. Airwars has identified the names of 1,532 of the individuals killed in the 200 cases it has published so far, and has managed to match 61 per cent of these names with individuals included in the Ministry of Health fatality list released on 26 October.

More than 20 people were killed by an IDF airstrike while sheltering in a church on 19 October. Airwars identified the names of at least 23 of those killed, including ten children, eight women and five men across three families; 15 of these names were included on the Ministry of Health public list.

Although the sample is small, Airwars has also found that the demographic proportions of deaths reported by the Ministry of Health are consistent with casualty records from independent reporting. In incidents where Airwars has been able to identify both the age and name of victims (some 868 individuals), 44% of these were children. This is consistent with MoH data on the proportion of child casualties.

Independent casualty recording organisation Insecurity Insight has recorded detailed information on 132 health workers killed in Gaza and 5 in the West Bank since 7 October 2023. They are continuing to gather information on the deaths of 300 individually identified health workers known to have been killed as of 25 January

The circumstances of death detailed in these casualty records indicate that the vast majority of health workers have been killed in airstrikes which hit health facilities, domestic buildings, or other buildings where they were sheltering. This means that they were often killed alongside their families or colleagues, resulting in the loss of multiple health workers in single incidents. This has both an immediate and long-term impact on the availability of healthcare in the region. In one incident in November, a dentist, her brother, who was a medical student, and her uncle and father who were both gynaecologists, were all killed after an airstrike hit their family's maternity hospital. In October, a family of doctors who ran an eye clinic in Gaza (including one ophthalmologist and three optometrists) were killed in a single airstrike along with 30 of their family members.

Insecurity Insight has also recorded detail of health workers who have been shot and killed either inside health facilities by IDF snipers stationed near hospitals or while trying to reach wounded individuals in the community. This is a violation of international humanitarian law, which states that medical personnel are protected persons and must not be targeted.

We urge the Council and its members to make use of, and support, casualty recording initiatives which adhere to the Standards for Casualty Recording for consistency, transparency and verifiability. The information compiled by these entities provides timely and important insights into the current status of the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the likely long-term impacts on access to fundamental rights to healthcare, education and other vital services. The Council must use this information to inform effective responses to the crisis.

We also call on Israel to uphold its obligations under international law to search for, identify, and record all casualties of armed conflict. It must continually adapt its military strategy and operations in light of these findings in order to avoid further excessive and unlawful loss of life.

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Airwars and Insecurity Insight, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.