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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
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Written statement^{*} submitted by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), 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.

[7 January 2009]

^{*} This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

Widespread mental trauma in Gaza must be addressed

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), which represents 142 treatment centres for torture survivors in 72 countries, including two such centres in Gaza, considers that attacks on civilian areas by both sides are deplorable and illegal but emphasises that Israel's intense bombardments of densely populated urban areas and civilian facilities, including hospitals, health clinics and ambulances, are in flagrant violation of the internationally accepted principle of proportionality and other key aspects of International Humanitarian Law.

Furthermore, the IRCT considers that Israel's continued blockade of essential goods into Gaza, including food, medicine and fuel, amounts to collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza and thus constitutes a blatant and serious violation of international law and fundamental human rights, including the right to health.

As an international health professional organisation the IRCT is extremely alarmed about the targeting of Gaza's health infrastructure with hospitals overwhelmed by casualties and facing severe shortages of medicines, electricity and other basic resources; several hospitals having received direct hits; at least six health professionals killed; and at least eleven ambulances and three mobile health clinics destroyed.

In addition, the IRCT wishes to emphasise that the current situation is exposing the population of Gaza to massive mental trauma, especially children, who are particularly vulnerable to the traumatising effects of the ongoing offensive. This is exacerbated by the fact that the provision of desperately needed mental health services is severely threatened in the current situation. On 30 December the premises of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) – a member of the IRCT – was destroyed by Israeli bombs. Since then the clinic has been unable to provide vital services to an ever increasing number of traumatised civilians. Moreover, another IRCT's member centre in the Gaza Strip, Jesoor for Trauma Recovery, has also been forced to cease its work due to the security situation.

Recommendations

- The IRCT calls for extensive and long-term efforts to be undertaken to address the urgent and extensive health needs, including the widespread mental trauma, among Gaza's civilian population at the earliest possible time.
- The IRCT specifically requests the Council to include the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health in any fact finding mission it might send to investigate human right violations in connection with the ongoing conflict.
- The IRCT urges all members of the Council to work towards a strong action based consensus resolution. Only through consensus and clear action points can the Council facilitate an effective human rights based investigation of events at the end of the current conflict.
