

April 5, 2002

Statement from International Fieldworkers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Beginning on March 29 with the reoccupation of Ramallah, the Israeli military has invaded Palestinian cities and occupied Palestinian areas in a massive military operation. This has created a humanitarian crisis among large parts of the civilian population who have been without water, food or electricity for days.

We, international fieldworkers in Palestine, have witnessed several instances where medical workers were denied access to civilians in need of treatment. Israeli soldiers shot live ammunition over the head of one of us when she was working as part of a health team and was wearing a uniform clearly marked with the Red Cross and Red Crescent symbols.

A Palestinian colleague, a doctor working for the Union of Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC), was used as a human shield during a house-to-house search in Ramallah by the Israeli military. After the search, Israeli soldiers severely damaged UPMRC's headquarters and several apartments in the same building. We have seen private property destroyed by the Israeli army and interviewed civilians whose homes have been occupied and the residents confined for days to one room without food.

We have also witnessed when volunteers, trying to rescue a wounded woman outside Ramallah Hospital, were shot at by Israeli soldiers even though the volunteers had stated their intentions and were clearly marked with the Red Cross and Red Crescent symbols. These acts cannot be justified. They threaten the lives of Palestinian civilians and international citizens working in the area, and are grave violations of international conventions such as the IV Geneva Convention.

As humanitarian organizations with a Christian foundation we urge the governments of Europe to pressure both parties of the conflict to immediately start negotiations based on UN resolutions and the Saudi peace proposal endorsed by the Arab League.

Palestinian authorities should condemn attacks targeting civilians and make every effort to stop them. Israeli authorities should be pressured to cease all human rights violations, including the excessive use of force, closures of villages and towns, destruction of Palestinian property, arbitrary arrests, and to allow free movement of medical workers, international humanitarian organizations and journalists.

Israel should end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and withdraw its military to the 1967 borders. International peacekeeping forces should be deployed to the Palestinian territories to ensure security and to supervise the transition of the territories to a Palestinian state after a peace treaty has been signed.

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