
Annan and UN envoy deplore Israeli destruction of buildings in Gaza

27 October 2003 –

The United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and his senior envoy for the Middle East today strongly deplored Israel's continuing demolition of Palestinian-owned buildings, especially the destruction of three 13-story buildings in the Gaza Strip over the weekend.

"The Secretary-General continues to follow with great concern the ongoing cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians," a spokesperson for Mr. Annan told a news briefing in New York. "He deplores all acts that fuel and intensify the conflict. The Secretary-General reminds the Israeli authorities that house demolitions amount to collective punishment, which is a clear violation of international humanitarian law."

During the past month, 2,000 people became homeless as Israel destroyed some 200 buildings in the Gaza Strip, spokesperson Marie Okabe said. In that connection, the Secretary-General deplored the destruction by the Israeli military of three 13-story buildings in the Gaza Strip on Saturday night.

Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said the punitive destruction of the buildings, "owned by families of Palestinian security personnel, is illegal."

"Such actions are also counterproductive towards Israel's legitimate security concerns, for they foster anger and despair among Palestinians," he said in a statement.

In other news, the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon said a Hezbollah unit fired mortars and missiles towards Israeli positions in the Shabaa farms area, located near the line of withdrawal by Israeli forces.

The Israeli army subsequently responded with artillery and aerial bombs, according to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). No casualties have been reported.

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Mr. Roed-Larsen deplored this latest violation of the so-called Blue Line, saying in a statement issued in New York that today's events "underscore yet again the acute need for the Government of Lebanon to exert full control over the use of force from its territory."

He urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint and respect fully the Blue Line.