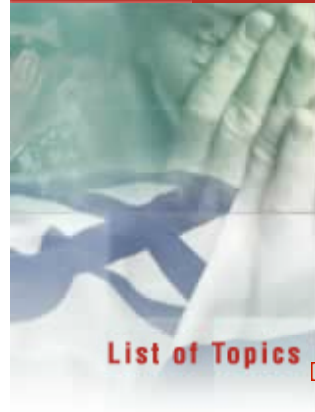




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Attacks on Israeli Civilians by Palestinians

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Since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada, there has been a sharp increase in the number of attacks perpetrated by Palestinian organizations against Israeli civilians. These attacks have killed hundreds of Israelis and wounded thousands, including many minors, inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories.

Attacks aimed at civilians undermine all rules of morality and law. Specifically, the intentional killing of civilians is considered a “grave breach” of international humanitarian law and a war crime. Whatever the circumstances, such acts are unjustifiable.

Palestinian organizations raise several arguments to justify attacks on Israeli civilians. The main argument is that “all means are legitimate in fighting for independence against a foreign occupation.” This argument is completely baseless, and contradicts the fundamental principle of international humanitarian law. According to this principle, civilians are to be protected from the consequences of warfare, and any attack must discriminate between civilians and military targets. This principle is part of international customary law; as such, it applies to every state, organization, and person, even those who are not party to any relevant convention.

Palestinian spokespersons distinguish between attacks inside Israel and attacks directed at settlers in the Occupied Territories. They argue that, because the settlements are illegal and many settlers belong to Israel's security forces, settlers are not entitled to the protections granted to civilians by international law.

This argument is readily refuted. The illegality of the settlements has no effect at all on the status of their civilian residents. The settlers constitute a distinctly civilian population, which is entitled to all the protections granted civilians by international law. The Israeli security forces' use of land in the settlements or the membership of some settlers in the Israeli security forces does not affect the status of the other residents living among them, and certainly does not make them proper targets of attack.

B'Tselem strongly opposes the attempts to justify attacks against Israeli civilians by using distorted interpretations of international law. Furthermore, B'Tselem demands that the Palestinian Authority do everything within its power to prevent future attacks and to prosecute the individuals involved in past attacks.