



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

A Fact Sheet

On Targeting of religious places
During the war on Gaza

Introduction:

Since the seventh of last October, Gaza has witnessed the most violent bombing in its history, the intensity and effects of which exceeded the extent of the damage caused by the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki¹. There was not a residential neighborhood, street, or building left that was not bombed by the Israeli occupation forces, which led to the death of 34,238 Palestinian



civilians². The Israeli bombing did not differentiate between a man, a woman, or a child, a civilian or an armed man. Rather, the occupation forces deliberately carried out an ethnic cleansing process from which it was not spared. The religious goals that carry the Palestinian identity are in blatant violation of international law and a violation of its clear principles that cannot be disputed.

Protecting sacred religious places in light of international law

On July 17, 2023, during its fifty-third session, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 53/1 entitled “Addressing religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence,” which came to affirm Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates that Any war propaganda is required by law, and any call to national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence is prohibited by law. This is after an increase in incidents of trespassing on places of worship and desecration of holy books³.

¹ The losses of the Hiroshima bombing exceed... Know the toll of the war on Gaza in 60 days, Al-Watan, December 2023.

<http://tinyurl.com/2xv2mpz7>

² Government Media Office in Gaza: The occupation has committed 2,325 massacres since October 7, Al-Shorouk, February 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/4em7k5b5>

³ <http://tinyurl.com/4nfetywd>

However, only three months after the issuance of the decision, the Israeli occupation forces violated these texts in all forms and left no room to justify the destruction they caused to mosques and churches, which are considered part of the history, culture, civilization and identity of the Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, and before being places of worship, they carry moral symbols for all Palestinians⁴.

Violation by the Israeli occupation forces of Resolution 53/1

- Human rights reports showed that the extent of Israeli violations and attacks on Islamic and Christian holy sites in Palestine during 2023 is the largest since the Nakba of 1948, and these attacks ranged from demolition and destruction in the Gaza Strip, the raids and desecration of Al-Aqsa and Ibrahimi Mosques and other mosques and churches in the West Bank, in addition to restrictions on the performance of worship and attacks on worshipers; Muslims and Christians⁵.
- As of February 3, 2024, the Israeli occupation forces had completely destroyed (183) mosques, and (264) mosques that were partially destroyed by the occupation, with three churches being targeted since the beginning of the aggression⁶. Although this is considered a grave violation of international law, the Israeli Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, openly praised these actions in front of the world by publishing on his Telegram account a short video of an Israeli soldier reciting a Jewish prayer through the mosque's speakers, praising that step⁷.
- The Israeli aggression against religious sanctities also carries indirect goals, represented by its urgent desire to erase Palestinian identity, cultural heritage, and Palestinian historical evidence, therefore, we always find attacks on religious heritage places.

Israeli occupation forces targeting Islamic holy sites

- The Palestinian Minister of Endowments stressed that when the Israeli occupation attacks mosques, as well as Al-Aqsa Mosque, which represents the first qibla for

⁴ The occupation army's bombing of places of worship is an extension of the attacks on them by dark and terrorist forces, Watan, October 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/mv7nwrnm>

⁵ In 2023...the most extensive targeting of Palestinian mosques and churches since the Nakba, Al Jazeera, January 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/4bmhdjzk>

⁶ Latest statistics of the genocidal war waged by the occupation against Gaza, Al-Ghad, February 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/mr3mr97t>

⁷ In a new provocation. Ben Ghafir publishes a video of the occupation soldiers desecrating a mosque in Jenin, Al-Shorouk, December 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/5n8a2emm>

Muslims, it is thus provoking one billion and 800 million Muslims in the world⁸. Until March 1, 2024, dozens of settlers stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque, from the direction of the Mughrabi Gate, carried out provocative tours in its courtyards, and performed Talmudic rituals under the protection of the occupation police. The occupation police stationed at the gates of the Old City and Al-Aqsa Mosque also prevented Palestinian citizens from entering, causing the number of worshipers to decrease for the fourth month in a row⁹.

- According to the report of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the occupation and settlers escalated their attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque, whether by the number of incursions that exceeded 258 intrusions, or by the number of intruders who were estimated at tens of thousands, in addition to dangerous Judaization plans that affected Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City, and dozens of deportations of the mosque's guards, marabouts, and citizens, and in the Ibrahimi Mosque, the Israeli occupation prevented the call to prayer 704 times and closed it for ten days¹⁰.
- The occupation forces deliberately destroyed 447 mosques while targeting them with missiles, one of which weighed 2 tons. Among them was one of the most prominent historical mosques in Gaza, such as the Great Al-Omari Mosque, which is considered one of the oldest and largest mosques in Gaza and dates back to the Mamluk era and can accommodate more than 2,000 worshipers. The Mosque of the Mamlut Prince Shihab al-Din al-Dhafar Damri, which was founded in the eighth century AH¹¹.
- Mosques were also not spared from desecration, as soldiers of the occupation forces deliberately entered the Jenin camp mosque in the occupied West Bank with their shoes during the noon call to prayer, arrested those inside, and then began using the loudspeakers in the mosque to chant Hanukkah songs¹².
- Testimonies of released detainees were also documented, stating that the Qur'an was torn up, urinated on, and trampled on¹³.

⁸ Palestinian Endowments: The Israeli occupation violates the sanctity of mosques and holy places, Youm7, December 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/yc5w2rm6>

⁹ Dozens of settlers' storm Al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of the Israeli occupation police, Al-Khaleej 65, February 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/mvxek7ye>

¹⁰ Endowments: The occupation stormed Al-Aqsa 258 times, prevented the call to prayer 704 times in Al-Ibrahimi, and attacked 388 mosques in Gaza, Wafa, January 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/yc2t9bsu>

¹¹ Implications of the destruction of mosques in Gaza, Al-Sharq, January 2024. <http://tinyurl.com/4twxd2nj>

¹² Occupation soldiers singing Hanukkah in a mosque in Jenin, Al Jazeera, December 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/mr3esf6c>

¹³ In the Negev prison... rape, urination on the Qur'an, and tearing it up, Al-Sharq Press, November 2023.

<http://tinyurl.com/2tnn7ddb>

Al-Omari Mosque after it was destroyed by Israeli bombing



The occupation forces targeted churches and Christians

- The Israeli bombing did not differentiate between Christians and Muslims. Although Gaza does not contain a large percentage of the Christian population, which numbered approximately a thousand people before the war, the occupation forces also deliberately targeted this few and violated their religious sanctities¹⁴.
- On the evening of last October 19, the Church of Saint Porphyrius witnessed violent bombardment by Israeli occupation missiles, which led to a large number of casualties and injuries among the displaced Palestinians in the church, including 17 Palestinian Christians, including 9 children. The Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem also announced that by bombing the church, Israel killed 2.25% of the remaining

¹⁴ What do we know about the destroyed mosques and churches in Gaza? BBC News, January 2024.

<http://tinyurl.com/2p9zuh2z>

Christians in Gaza with one blow¹⁵. It is worth noting that this church belongs to the Greek Orthodox in the center of the Gaza Strip, and it sheltered more than 400 Palestinians, Muslims and Christians, who were taking shelter in it before it was destroyed by the Israeli bombing¹⁶.

- The occupation forces had multiple tricks to desecrate Christian places of worship. If the occupation forces did not target churches with direct bombardment, they were encroaching on them and violating their sanctity, in addition to harassing Christians and preventing them from performing their rituals. On October 18, they attempted to storm Saint Elias Church in the city of Haifa, which belongs to the Melkite Greek Patriarchate¹⁷. On August 18, the Israeli police prevented thousands of Christians from going up to the Orthodox Church on Mount Tabor to celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany (Divine Transfiguration)¹⁸.
- The occupation forces did not leave any room for the rights of Christians without violating them. The occupation aircraft launched raids targeting the headquarters of the Young Men's Christian Association in Gaza, which houses 300 displaced people, resulting in a number of martyrs and wounded¹⁹.
- On December 16, Nahida Khalil Boulos Antoun and her daughter, Samar Kamal Antoun, were martyred, and seven others were injured, by Israeli occupation sniper bullets, in the Holy Family Church in Gaza. As the occupation tanks surrounding the Al-Zaytoun neighborhood of Gaza City target anyone moving inside the church square, and the occupation forces continue to threaten more than 600 displaced people, the majority of whom are Christians in Gaza, with the evacuation of the church²⁰.

¹⁵ The Greek Archbishop of Jerusalem: Israel killed 2.5% of Gaza's Christians in one bombing, Al-Masry Al-Youm, October 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/3dpr5p25>

¹⁶ The Church of St. Porphyrius in Gaza announces that it has been subjected to a "bombing"... and Israel comments, CNN Arabic, October 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/yzxewch2>

¹⁷ The Presidential Committee condemns the attack by Israeli extremists on the Saint Elias Church in Haifa, Wafa, July 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/yeabn23u>

¹⁸ Israeli police prevent thousands of Christians from reaching the church on Mount Tabor, Shorouk, August 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/3d3da5k6>

¹⁹ Nabd, December 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/4jwjbsy7>

²⁰ A mother and her daughter were killed by occupation snipers in the Holy Family Church in Gaza, Wafa, December 2023. <http://tinyurl.com/22y3zvvv>

Church of Saint Porphyrius



Recommendations

1. The position of the international community must be more stringent in dealing with the blatant violation of international laws and principles that deprive the Israeli occupation forces of their value in ruling the world and open the way wide for future violations and non-compliance from the rest of the parties.
2. The major powers must reach a comprehensive diplomatic agreement with the occupying forces, guaranteeing the protection of the sanctity and inviolability of places of worship and religious places and removing them from the cycle of conflict and war.
3. Civil society must work to raise awareness and educate about the importance and history of places of worship that were completely destroyed so that their effects do not disappear over time if they are not restored.
4. The United Nations must escalate its measures against the crimes of the occupation forces, reaching the point of suspending the membership of Israel, which every day violates an article of its Charter, until the ceasefire.