

'Operation Cast Lead': A Statistical Analysis

August 2009

Al-Haq is an independent Palestinian non-governmental human rights organisation based in Ramallah, West Bank. Established in 1979 to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the organisation has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Al-Haq documents violations of the individual and collective rights of Palestinians in the OPT, irrespective of the identity of the perpetrator, and seeks to end such breaches by way of advocacy before national and international mechanisms and by holding the violators accountable. The organisation conducts research; prepares reports, studies and interventions on breaches of international human rights and humanitarian law in the OPT; and undertakes advocacy before local, regional and international bodies. Al-Haq also cooperates with Palestinian civil society organisations and governmental institutions in order to ensure that international human rights standards are reflected in Palestinian law and policies. The organisation has a specialised international law library for the use of its staff and the local community.

Al-Haq is the West Bank affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists - Geneva, and is a member of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Habitat International Coalition (HIC), and the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO).

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the above partners.

Introduction

On the morning of 27 December 2008, the Israeli occupying forces launched 'Operation Cast Lead,' a wide-ranging military offensive against the Gaza Strip. 80 warplanes carried out a devastating surprise airstrike campaign whose scale and intensity signalled Israel's intention to inflict widespread destruction throughout the Gaza Strip.

After 22 days of unrelenting aerial attacks coupled with an intensive ground invasion that began on 3 January 2009, the death toll exceeded 1,400 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians including women and children. Over 5,000 more were wounded. Excessive civilian casualties were compounded by the unprecedented destruction of civilian infrastructure across the Gaza Strip including hospitals, schools, mosques, civilian homes, police stations and United Nations compounds.

During the offensive, Al-Haq's fieldworkers, as well as those of its partner organisation, the Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights, collected information and evidence relating to the ongoing attack throughout the Gaza Strip. Owing to the sheer volume of incidents that occurred over the 22-day assault, Al-Haq, supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, recruited six additional temporary fieldworkers to assist its two permanent field workers in Gaza, who are supported by Diakonia. During the assault and in the months following it, the field workers set about comprehensively documenting the destruction wrought during the offensive. 30,000 copies of questionnaires were prepared in order to collect data on the damage inflicted during the attack, and the fieldworkers went from site to site meticulously documenting the details of each incident. Sworn affidavits were taken from witnesses and victims, as well as supportive visual evidence in the form of photographs and videos. Medical reports were obtained from hospitals where relevant. Details were verified and cross-checked, and all the information was entered into a single database kept jointly with Al-Mezan.

This report presents a selection of the data collected, with tables illustrating the extent of the killing and the destruction perpetrated by the Israeli Occupying Forces during the offensive.

Killings during Operation Cast Lead

'Operation Cast Lead' was characterised by an alarming proportion of Palestinian civilian casualties. This report finds that, of the **1409 Palestinian casualties** of the offensive, 1172 were civilians, 342 of whom were children.¹

Table 1: No. of Palestinians Killed by Combatant/Non-Combatant Status

Category	Number Killed
Combatants	237
Of whom killed by targeted assassination	18
Of whom children	13
Non-combatants	1172
Of whom children	342
Of whom women	111
Of whom Civil Police	136
Total number of children killed	355
Total number of persons killed	1409

Combatants are defined by international humanitarian law as those taking a direct part in hostilities. Those not taking a direct part in hostilities [or not members of an armed force that is party to a conflict] are defined as non-combatant civilians and are protected from attack by the laws of armed conflict. While the law does acknowledge that civilians may sometimes be the victims of a legitimate attack against a military target, parties to a conflict are bound to at all times distinguish between combatants and civilians, to refrain from targeting civilians, and to take all necessary precautions to ensure that the risk of harm to civilians is minimised.

The fact that **over 83% of those killed by the Israeli forces during Operation Cast Lead were civilians** suggests that such distinction or precautions were not taken into account in the planning and conduct of hostilities. Numerous testimonies given by Israeli soldiers who participated in the offensive have revealed a glaring disregard for civilian life, both in the orders received and the practices carried out by the invading troops. A compilation of such testimonies by one Israeli veteran soldiers' organisation contains revelations of "the destruction of hundreds of houses and mosques for no military purpose, the firing of phosphorous gas in the direction of populated areas, the killing of innocent victims with small arms, the destruction of private property" and "an atmosphere that encouraged shooting anywhere."²

Al-Haq and Al-Mezan's investigations have found that 237 Palestinians were taking a direct part in hostilities at the time they were killed, or were active members of armed groups killed by targeted assassinations by Israeli forces during Operation Cast Lead. They are thus

¹ Al-Haq uses the International Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis for the definition of a child as being all persons who have not yet reached the age of 18. Israel employs this standard in relation to Israeli children, but in relation to Palestinians, such as those in the Gaza Strip, it defines children as those under the age of 16.

² See Breaking the Silence statement of 15 July 2009 at http://breakingthesilence.org.il/news_item_e.asp?id=30, and full report: Breaking the Silence, *Soldiers Testimonies from Operation Cast Lead, Gaza 2009*, July 2009.

classified as combatants. Bystanders who were killed in the vicinity of assassinations but who did not appear to be targeted by the Israeli assassination operations are classified as civilians.

With regard to the large number of Palestinian police officers killed when police stations and cadet graduations were targeted by airstrikes on the first day of 'Operation Cast Lead', international humanitarian law holds that civil police who are responsible for regular police duties such as ordinary internal law enforcement or traffic regulation are defined as civilians.³ The Civil Police under the de facto Hamas government in the Gaza Strip are separate from both the Hamas Internal Security Forces and the National Security Forces. The Civil Police is comprised of civilian police officers whose primary task, similar to any civilian police force, is the maintenance of civic order within the Gaza Strip. Civil Police officers serve no military function and are therefore not combatants. As such, unless police officers are formally incorporated into the Hamas armed forces and are taking a direct part in hostilities, they are to be afforded civilian protection and may not be legitimately targeted. Al-Haq and Al-Mezan's investigations found that a handful of Civil Police killed during Operation Cast Lead were active members of armed groups engaged in hostilities with Israel. They are treated for the purposes of the table above as combatants, separate to the 136 non-combatant Civil Police officers killed during the offensive.

It is worth noting that the figures produced by the comprehensive investigation and verification by Al-Haq and Al-Mezan's fieldworkers serve as evidence that **the figures released by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs amount to a deliberate misrepresentation** of the reality of 'Operation Cast Lead'. The data presented by Israel contends that there were 1,166 Palestinians killed in 'Operation Cast Lead', 709 of whom were " Hamas terror operatives," 295 of whom were "uninvolved" (including 89 children), and 162 of whom "have not been yet attributed to any organization."⁴

With regard to the geographical spread of the offensive, the investigations conducted for this report found that the Israeli military attacks concentrated primarily on the densely populated North Gaza and Gaza City districts, although less intense attacks were carried-out across the Gaza Strip. 500 Palestinians were killed in the North Gaza district, 600 in Gaza City, 150 in Central Gaza, 101 in Khan Younis, and 58 in the Rafah district. 85% of those killed were male.

The documentation of killings of Israelis during 'Operation Cast Lead' is beyond the investigative remit of Al-Haq and Al-Mezan, but it is widely accepted that ten Israeli combatants were killed (six of whom by Palestinian armed groups and four by fellow Israeli soldiers) and that three civilians were killed during the operation.⁵

With regard to the weapons used in the killing of Palestinians during 'Operation Cast Lead', Table 2, below, shows that the majority of deaths were caused by missiles or bombs dropped primarily by Israeli airstrikes:

³ See Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck, *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Customary International Humanitarian Law*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, Rules 4, 5 and 6, pp. 14 -24.

⁴ See Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Communication, "Vast majority of Palestinians killed in Operation Cast Lead terror initiatives," 26 March 2009. Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Hamas+war+against+Israel/Vast+majority+Palestinians+killed+Operation+Cast+Lead+terror+operatives_26-Mar-2009.htm.

⁵ See, for example, Statement by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, 17 January 2009, available at: <http://www.israeemb.org/Operation%20Cast%20Lead/Israeli%20Officials%20statements.htm>.

Table 2: Distribution of Killings by Type of Weapon Used and Age Category

Type of Weapon	Age Category								Total	
	0-17		18-40		41-60		60+			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Flechettes ⁶	1	0.28	2	0.24	0	0	1	1.69	4	0.28
Missile/Bomb ⁷	244	68.73	703	85.73	134	76.57	35	59.32	1116	79.21
Artillery Shell	55	15.49	59	7.20	19	10.86	7	11.86	140	9.94
Explosive	2	0.56	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.14
Gas	1	0.28	0	0	0	0	1	1.69	2	0.14
Shooting	27	7.61	36	4.39	16	9.14	13	22.03	92	6.53
Beating	1	0.28	1	0.12	1	0.57	0	0	3	0.21
Other	24	6.76	19	2.32	5	2.86	2	3.39	50	3.55
Total	355	100	820	100	175	100	59	100	1409	100

Of the 92 Palestinians that were shot dead by Israeli troops on the ground, 53 were shot exclusively in the upper body, 10 in the lower body, and the rest in both the upper and lower body. Such targeting of the upper body in the vast majority of cases demonstrates a clear intent to kill.

The fact that 27 children were shot by Israeli troops further demonstrates a tendency to shoot to kill even in situations where the victim was causing no imminent danger to the soldiers concerned. An Israeli infantry squad commander described one such incident:

"There was a house with a family inside ... We put them in a room. Later we left the house and another platoon entered it, and a few days after that there was an order to release the family. They had set up positions upstairs. There was a sniper position on the roof. The platoon commander let the family go and told them to go to the right. One mother and her two children didn't understand and went to the left ... The sharpshooter saw a woman and children approaching him, closer than the lines he was told no one should pass. He shot them straight away ... I don't think he felt too bad about it, because after all, as far as he was concerned, he did his job according to the orders he was given. And the atmosphere in general, from what I understood from most of my men who I talked to ... I don't know how to describe it ... The lives of Palestinians, let's say, is something very, very less important than the lives of our soldiers. So as far as they are concerned they can justify it that way."⁸

In addition to Palestinian children being shot by ground troops, a large number of children were killed by Israeli airstrikes, including during the initial wave of devastating attacks on the first day of 'Operation Cast Lead'. These attacks were carried out from 11.30am onwards, a time at which the majority of Gaza's school children were out in the streets or school grounds. Most schools in Gaza work on a shift basis with some children attending in the mornings and others in the afternoons.

⁶ Flechettes are small metal darts, approximately 4mm in length, thousands of which are released and disperse up to a range of 300m upon explosion in the air of flechette shells fired from tanks.

⁷ Of the 1,116 Palestinians killed by such missiles or bombs, 473 were killed by missiles from Israeli fighter jets, 519 from unmanned drones, 92 from Israeli military helicopters, 7 from Israeli warships, with the source of the missiles that caused the remaining 25 deaths undetermined.

⁸ Transcript of the accounts of Israeli soldiers at a pre-military course at Oranim Academic college, quoted in Rory McCarthy, 'Israeli troops describe shooting Gaza civilians,' *The Guardian*, 20 March 2009.

As can be seen from Table 3, approximately one third of those killed during the offensive were school students, with a further 5% of pre-school age:

Table 3: Distribution of Killings by School Completion Levels

School Completion Status	Number	Percentage
Completed high school	388	27.54
Did not complete high school	489	34.71
Attending school	467	33.14
Too young to attend school	65	4.61
Total	1409	100

The following table bears witness to the fact that a high number of persons were dependent on or supported by those killed during 'Operation Cast Lead':

Table 4: Distribution of Killings by District and Dependent Status

Dependent Status	District					Total
	North Gaza	Gaza City	Central Gaza	Khan Younis	Rafah	
Had dependents	165	144	81	44	18	452
No dependents	278	413	44	45	29	809
Supported others financially	57	43	25	12	11	148
No. of persons supported	1171	1140	516	257	177	3261

Medical personnel and ambulances are often subject to direct attack by Israeli forces in the OPT, and field investigations show that this was the case in the Gaza Strip during 'Operation Cast Lead'. As well as being the subject of attack themselves, medical teams were routinely prevented by the Israeli army from attempting to treat the wounded and remove bodies of those killed. In almost 20% of the cases of killings during the offensive, medical treatment for the victim was obstructed:

Table 5: Distribution of Killings by Whether Medical Treatment was Obstructed

Obstruction	Number	Percentage
Medical Treatment was Obstructed	258	18.31
Medical Treatment was not Obstructed	1151	81.69
Total	1409	100

Although in possession of precision military technology, Israeli forces appeared not to take any measures to avert attacks from afflicting civilian homes and busy public spaces. Over 20% of those killed in the attacks on Gaza were taking refuge in their own homes at the time:

Table 6: Distribution of Killings by Place of Death

Place of Death	Number	Percentage
Public space / outside home	851	60.40
In Ambulance	7	0.50
In Hospital	153	10.86
At Home	286	20.30
Other	112	7.95
Total	1409	100

The Gaza Strip has a large refugee population comprised of those forcibly removed from their homes throughout Palestine in 1948. The refugees remain displaced and denied their right of return, and live in densely populated refugee camps. Almost 60% of those killed by the most recent Israeli offensive in Gaza were Palestinian refugees:

Table 7: Distribution of Deceased by Refugee Status

Refugee Status	Number	Percentage
Refugee	834	59.19
Non-Refugee	575	40.81
Total	1409	100

Property Destruction During Operation Cast Lead: Residential

Al-Haq and Al-Mezan have been able to document the destruction of, or damage to, 11,154 civilian homes (housing units) by the Israeli military during 'Operation Cast Lead'. Of these, 2,632 were totally destroyed (i.e. destroyed beyond repair) and 8,522 were partially destroyed (i.e. assessed as repairable). Over 100,000 Palestinian residents were directly affected by this damage and destruction, including over 50,000 children. Such extensive destruction of property, carried out unlawfully and wantonly, and not justified by military necessity, is defined as a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions - the most egregious category of war crimes which entail an obligation on all High Contracting Parties to the Conventions to prosecute those responsible.

Table 8: Destroyed or Damaged Housing Units

District	Gender of head of household of destroyed housing units		Number of permanent residents in housing units	Total number houses	Number of permanent child residents
	Male	Female			
North Gaza	3111	204	32411	3315	15565
Gaza	5487	409	60583	5896	30634
Middle	422	46	3817	468	1801
Khan Younis	444	45	3584	489	1834
Rafah	924	60	7114	984	3441
Total	10388	764	107509	11152⁹	53275

Table 9: Types of housing units damaged or destroyed

Type of housing unit	Number	Percentage
Villa	175	1.57
Ground floor	1849	16.58
Rural cottage/residence	372	3.34
Roof-top house	1	0.01
Multi-story building	4337	38.88
UNRWA house	1487	13.33
Apartment	2933	26.30
Total	11154	100

⁹ This figure is lower than the total of 11,154 houses destroyed or damaged as full information was not attainable on two of the houses.

Over half of the Palestinian houses destroyed or damaged during 'Operation Cast Lead' were those of refugee families:

Table 10: Distribution of affected housing units by refugee status

Refugee Status	Number	Percentage
Refugee	6125	54.92
Non-Refugee	5027	45.08
Total	11152	100

Almost 85% of the damage to houses was done by shells fired from tanks or airstrikes, with almost 12% of the houses destroyed by Israeli bulldozers:

Table 11: Methods of destruction

Method of destruction	District										Total	
	North Gaza		Gaza City		Central Gaza		Khan Younis		Rafah			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bulldozed	509	14.49	489	8.297	43	9.13	226	46.58	68	6.907	1335	11.8
Occupied by Israeli forces¹⁰	224	6.403	71	1.19	1	0.212	2	0.207	0	0	298	2.619
Shelled	2659	76.4	5295	90.01	431	90.45	260	53.21	903	92.78	9548	84.44
Explosives	93	2.707	29	0.508	1	0.212	0	0	3	0.309	126	1.138
Total	3436	100	5713	100	471	100	483	100	970	100	11307¹¹	100

Table 12: Distribution of affected housing units by district and extent of damage

Extent of Damage	District											
	North Gaza		Gaza City		Central Gaza		Khan Younis		Rafah		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	890	26.83	904	15.33	174	37.18	246	50.31	418	42.48	2632	23.60
Partial	2427	73.17	4992	84.67	294	62.82	243	49.69	566	57.52	8522	76.40
Total	3317	100	5896	100	468	100	489	100	984	100	11154	100

¹⁰ This refers to homes that were invaded and occupied by Israeli ground troops and damaged during or after such occupation.

¹¹ This figure is higher than the total number of 11,154 houses destroyed or damaged on account of homes destroyed by more than one method.

Table 13: Damage to housing units by district, extent of destruction, residents

District					Total	
	Total destruction	Number of residents	Partial destruction	Number of residents	Partial and Total	Total number residents
North Gaza	890	8073	2427	24549	3317	32622
Gaza	904	7982	4992	53764	5896	61746
Middle	174	1277	294	2540	468	3817
Khan Younis	246	1693	243	1891	489	3584
Rafah	418	3028	566	4092	984	7120
Total	2632	22053	8522	86836	11154	108889

The table above demonstrates that well over 100,000 Gazans were directly affected by the damage to and destruction of Palestinian houses during 'Operation Cast Lead'. At least 51,000 people were "internally displaced in makeshift shelters that provided minimal protection"¹² while the Israeli bombardment continued. The Israeli authorities denied these displaced persons the opportunity to leave the Gaza Strip for the duration of the fighting, and at the same time refused to establish "neutralized zones" as provided for by Article 15 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to shelter the civilian population from the effects of war.

¹² Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk, to the Human Rights Council, 17 March 2009. UN Doc. A/HRC/10/20, para. 8.

Property Destruction During Operation Cast Lead: Commercial

211 industrial premises were damaged in the Israeli attacks, 102 of which were completely destroyed and 109 partially destroyed. Of the 102 completely destroyed, more than half of them were destroyed by military bulldozers, demonstrating that such destruction was deliberate and indicative of the Israeli intent to damage Palestinian industrial and economic resources in the Gaza Strip.

Table 14: Destruction of industrial premises by district, method of destruction and extent of damage

Method of Destruction	District					Total	
	North Gaza	Gaza City	Central Gaza	Khan Younis	Rafah		
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	%
Totally Destroyed							
Occupied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bulldozed	22	29	0	0	2	53	51.96
Shelled/bombed	16	24	1	3	0	44	43.14
Exploded	5	0	0	0	0	5	4.90
Partially Destroyed							
Occupied	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.92
Bulldozed	3	5	0	0	1	9	8.26
Shelled/bombed	22	69	3	2	2	98	89.91
Exploded	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.92
Total							
Occupied	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.47
Bulldozed	25	33	0	0	3	62	29.38
Shelled/bombed	37	95	3	4	2	142	67.30
Exploded	5	1	0	0	0	6	2.84
Total						211	100

The economic impact of 'Operation Cast Lead' on the already besieged Gaza Strip was devastating. As can be seen from Table 15 below, the 211 factories affected were forced to lay off over 75% of their employees on account of the destruction, resulting in over 2,200 job losses. Table 16 shows that 703 commercial stores in Gaza were partially or fully destroyed, resulting in a further 765 job losses, while Table 17 highlights the extent of further commercial and public premises adversely affected by the Israeli attacks, particularly educational institutions and places of worship.

Table 15: Factories Damaged or Destroyed by Type of Industry, Number of Employees

Type of industry	Number of factories affected:		Number of employees before offensive		Number of employees after offensive		Number of employees laid off as consequence	
	Total damage	Partial damage	Total damage	Partial damage	Total damage	Partial damage	Total damage	Partial damage
Plastics	0	3	0	34	0	18	0	16
Wood	9	11	103	159	16	87	87	72
Food	19	12	168	320	24	140	144	180
Electrical	2	3	90	19	0	5	90	14
Chemical	6	7	41	84	0	44	41	40
Mineral	27	36	266	401	29	224	237	177
Garment	8	15	124	144	0	22	124	122
Construction	31	22	490	431	19	39	471	392
Total	102	109	1282	1592	88	579	1194	1013

Table 16: Number of trade premises (stores) destroyed or damaged: extent of damage, number of workers before/after offensive

Location (district)	Extent of Damage	No. of stores affected	No. of workers before offensive	No. of workers at present
Rafah	Total destruction	13	25	4
	Partial destruction	42	30	19
Khan Younis	Total destruction	0	0	0
	Partial destruction	4	5	4
Central Gaza	Total destruction	4	6	3
	Partial destruction	1	2	0
Gaza City	Total destruction	81	203	84
	Partial destruction	390	1171	910
North Gaza	Total destruction	67	241	38
	Partial destruction	101	295	151
Total		703	1978	1213

Table 17: Destruction of other Commercial and Public Premises

Type of Establishment	Percentage	Number
Bank	0.16	1
Place of Worship	22.15	136
Market	0.16	1
Company	2.77	17
Community Based Organisation	7.49	46
Educational institution	25.90	159
Health institution	3.26	20
Police station	7.98	49
Ministry department	11.07	68
Political party offices	0.49	3
Political faction premises	2.61	16
Executive Forces premises	0.81	5
Other	15.15	93
Total	100	614

The agricultural sector, which comprises a substantial element of the Palestinian economy, was also severely affected by the Israeli offensive. Large areas of agricultural land was destroyed without any military necessity, adversely affecting the livelihoods of over 18,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Table 18: Agricultural Land Destroyed, by District

District	% from total destroyed land	Area (in dunums ¹³)
North Gaza	27.46	1721.93
Gaza City	60.03	3765.17
Central Gaza	0.98	61.70
Khan Younis	4.87	305.50
Rafah	6.66	417.45
Total	100	6271.746

Table 19: Direct Losses in the Agricultural Sector

Type of losses	Total losses in the Gaza Strip	Unit
Greenhouse	89	Number
	184.936	Area (in dunam)
Ground greenhouses	42	Number
	142.844	Area (in dunam)
Water-well	862	Number
Irrigation pool	210	Number
	34968	Capacity (in cubic meter)
Water pump	219	Number
Pesticide sprayer	302	Number of orchards
	368	Number of sprayers
Gates	735	Number of orchards
	1038	Number
Livestock	178	Number of orchards
	8721	Number of animals
Warehouse	205	Number of orchards
	10405	Number of warehouses
Birds	191	Number of orchards
	305430	Number of birds
Beehives	46	Number of orchards
	1010	Number of beehives

¹³ A dunum is a unit of area used in the Ottoman Empire and still used, in various standardised versions, in many countries formerly part of the Ottoman Empire. In the OPT, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, one dunum is 1,000 square metres, or 10,764 square feet.

Table 20: Damage to plants, trees and vegetables, by district

Type of plants/trees	District					Total
	North Gaza	Gaza	Central Gaza	Khan Younis	Rafah	
No. of productive trees	186473	195039	1180	7168	6739	396599
No. of unproductive trees	45586	6053	0	0	60	51699
Vegetables (area in dunam)	228.33	712.455	23	0	36	999.785
Total	232059	201092	1180	7168	6799	448298

Table 21: Number of persons whose livelihoods were secured from destroyed land

District	Number
North Gaza	5687
Gaza City	11040
Central Gaza	118
Khan Younis	1117
Rafah	724
Total	18686

Conclusion

On the basis of the data presented in this report, an analysis of the choice of targeted areas, methods of attack and the number of civilians killed and injured clearly indicates a reckless disregard for civilian life synonymous with intent. Further, it is clear that 'Operation Cast Lead' was not just an assault against the Palestinian population, but also against the Gaza Strip's infrastructure and the livelihoods of its people, with factories, farms and other economic resources systematically targeted. Prima facie evidence exists of the commission of war crimes amounting to grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, most notably wilful killing of civilians, including women and children; extensive destruction of property, both residential and commercial, public and private; and wilfully causing great suffering and serious injury to body or health. This is in addition to the fact that the resort to the use of force by Israel was unlawful in the first place.

The denial of access to foreign journalists during the siege and Israel's refusal to cooperate with various international investigation mechanisms that have been established are testament to a desire to suppress the truth and full information regarding the scale of the destruction wrought by this unprecedented attack. The figures contained in this report are intended to contribute to a growing database of documentary evidence on 'Operation Cast Lead'.

More than six months after the end of operation, the Gaza Strip remains under siege. The continued border closures by Israel and the prevention of crucial supplies from entering Gaza, ensure that the humanitarian situation remains dire.