

PRESS



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Killing the Messengers: Israel's War on Journalists in Gaza

A Report on the Protection of Journalists under International Humanitarian Law

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Table of contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction.....	3
Understanding the rise of Israeli pressure against journalists	4
<i>Israeli policies against the freedom of the press.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Violence stemming from civil society.....</i>	<i>5</i>
Israel's targeting of journalists in the context of the war in Gaza	6
<i>The toll of the war on Gaza on journalists and media workers</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Deliberately targeting the press.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Attacking media infrastructures.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Comparing Gaza to other armed conflicts.....</i>	<i>7</i>
How does International Humanitarian Law protect journalists?	9
<i>Under the Geneva Conventions and Customary IHL</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>A relevant framework relying on the classification of the conflict</i>	<i>10</i>
Conclusion	11
About GICJ	12

Executive summary

The war in Gaza has become the deadliest armed conflict for journalists in modern history. As of August 2025, at least 192 journalists and media workers have been killed, surpassing the total number of losses in other major ongoing conflicts such as Ukraine and Sudan. Among them were six Al-Jazeera staffers killed in an Israeli strike on 11 August 2025, including the well-known correspondent Anas al-Sharif. On 25 August 2025, five other members of the press were killed in Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis. Their deaths exemplify a broader pattern of targeting Palestinian reporters and silencing independent voices.

Israel has combined military strikes against journalists and media infrastructure with restrictive laws, censorship, and smear campaigns. Amendments to its Counter-Terrorism Law, bans on foreign media outlets such as Al-Jazeera, and strict military censorship have drastically limited freedom of information. This not only conceals the reality of the war from international audiences but also curtails information among Israelis, limiting their understanding of the war and furthering the government's narrative of victimhood. Right-wing groups within Israeli society further exacerbate these attacks on journalists, reinforcing impunity and normalising hostility toward the press.

Under international humanitarian law, journalists are considered civilians and must be protected unless directly participating in hostilities. Yet Israel routinely disregards these protections by targeting journalists, whether through airstrikes, drone attacks, arrests, or intimidation, which constitutes a grave violation of the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute, amounting to war crimes.

The **Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)** strongly condemns Israel's systematic targeting of journalists in Gaza and across the occupied Palestinian territories. GICJ is appalled by smear campaigns branding Palestinian reporters as terrorists to justify attacks and calls for accountability before the International Criminal Court. The organisation urges Israel to respect international law, repeal restrictive legislation on media freedom, and uphold UN Security Council Resolution 1738. Finally, GICJ supports UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan's call for journalists covering armed conflicts to be recognised as humanitarian workers, ensuring stronger protection, and urges the UN to establish an independent mechanism to investigate these grave violations and end impunity.



Palestinian broadcast journalist Mohammed Abu Namous and his cameraman covering the war in Gaza. © UN News
Image source: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1162861>

Introduction

On 11 August 2025, five Palestinian Al-Jazeera journalists and a freelance reporter were killed in Gaza City, in a targeted Israeli strike near the Al-Shifa hospital. Among the five was Anas al-Sharif, a native of Jabalia, in the north of the Gaza Strip, whose face became known to Al-Jazeera's viewers as he frequently appeared on the channel's coverage of the war. He had received Amnesty International Australia's Human Rights Defender Award in 2024 for his resilient work, broadcasting the war in Gaza to the world despite loss and the constant threats to his life.¹ The five other victims were correspondent Mohammed Qreiqeh, cameramen Ibrahim Zaher, Mohammed Noufal and Moamen Aliwa and freelance journalist Mohammed al-Khaldi. Similarly, on 25 August 2025, a double airstrike on Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis killed twenty people, including five journalists: Husam al-Masri, a Reuters cameraman, Mariam Dagga, a freelance correspondent for AP, Mohammad Salama, a reporter for AL Jazeera, Middle East Eye freelancer Ahmed Abu Aziz and photographer Moaz Abu Taha². Their names added to the already long list of Palestinian journalists killed by Israel since 7 October 2023, and more broadly throughout its occupation of the Palestinian territories, as the killing of Al-Jazeera's Shireen Abu Akleh in May 2022 reminds us.

Journalists are defined by a 1975 UN draft resolution on the protection of journalists engaged in dangerous missions in areas of armed conflict as "any correspondent, reporter, photographer, and their technical film, radio and television assistants who are ordinarily engaged in any of these activities as their principal occupation".³ Additionally, UNESCO's Institute of Statistics has defined journalists as "professionals hired by media organizations to research, investigate, interpret, edit, write and produce

¹ [Amnesty International condemns the deliberate killing of Al-Jazeera journalists, including Anas al-Sharif](#)

² [Five journalists among 20 killed in Israeli double strike on hospital - BBC](#)

³ [Protection of Journalists - How does law protect in war?](#)

news and media content through television, radio and other media,” which “includes announcers/anchors employed by broadcasting organizations but excludes occupations such as public relations officer, photojournalist and camera operator.”⁴

The six journalists killed on 11 August were deliberately attacked, and their deaths were surrounded by a smear campaign from Israeli authorities, who argued they were targeting the head of a Hamas terrorist cell.⁵ Yet, they failed to provide evidence for their allegations, fueling the international outcry against this blatant attempt to silence the voices of those who document the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Understanding the rise of Israeli pressure against journalists

Since 7 October 2023, the right-wing Israeli government has built a narrative of victimhood to justify the Israeli Occupied Territories (IOF) ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. This includes instrumentalising the hostages suffering in their propaganda, strategically using cover-ups, controlling information and weaponising public records. This narrative relies on silencing the dissenting voices that could underscore their disinformation campaign.

Israeli policies against the freedom of the press

Freedom of expression and the right to receive information are fundamental rights under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Yet, the State of Israel has progressively worked towards limiting them. On 8 November 2023, a new amendment to the Counter-Terrorism Law was introduced in the Knesset, Israel's house of representatives, criminalising the “consumption of terrorist material” The government can potentially weaponise this interpretation to limit the scope of action of the media. Furthermore, in May 2024, the Israeli government shut down foreign channels, including by banning Al-Jazeera, which led to their Ramallah office being raided by Israeli soldiers and its forced closure for 45 days in September 2024.⁶

Israeli media outlets have also been targeted by this crackdown on the freedom of the press. Under Israeli military censorship, publication is closely monitored, with articles being redacted⁷. The American news organisation *The Intercept* even reported on an order from the Chief Censor of the IOF, Brigade General Kobi Mandelblit, listing topics Israeli media are banned from reporting on without prior approval from the office of the Israeli Military Censor.⁸ The list includes :

- hostages;
- operational details;
- intelligence;
- weapons systems;
- rocket attacks;
- cyberattacks;
- visits by senior officials;
- Security Cabinet.

Along with the intensifying pressure against journalists covering the anti-government movement and those critical of the authorities, this climate fosters self-censorship among journalists. This leads to

⁴ [Journalists - UNESCO Institute of Statistics](#)

⁵ [Five Al Jazeera journalists killed in Israeli strike in Gaza - BBC](#)

⁶ [Israeli soldiers raid, order closure of Al Jazeera office in Ramallah - Al-Jazeera](#)

⁷ [Israel and Palestine: A year on, the assault on freedom of expression continues - Article 19](#)

⁸ [Israeli Military Censor bans reporting of these 8 subjects - The Intercept](#)

disinformation, furthering Prime Minister Netanyahu's government's propaganda and its weaponisation of information.

Violence stemming from civil society

Rhetoric against media freedom not only shapes policies but has also been driven by popular action, mainly from right-wing extremists. A notorious example of this is the attack against journalists by a mob of far-right youth in Jerusalem's Old City on 5 June 2025, during the "Jerusalem Day March". According to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, a total of 18 journalists were injured during this event, whether local or foreign. Among those was Palestinian freelance journalist Saif Al-Qawasmi, who was beaten by the crowd despite wearing his blue press vest, and *Haaretz* correspondent Nir Hasson. According to witnesses and video evidence, the police didn't intervene at first, and then arrested and interrogated the journalist. This violence against members of the press underscores not only the climate of impunity among right-wing Israelis but also how the government's discourse regarding the press imprints on civil society, leading them to physically intervene to limit journalists' ability to report on certain events.



Palestinian freelance journalist Saif Al-Qawasmi being beaten up by a crowd during Jerusalem Day March, 5 June 2025

© Hazem Bader / AFP

Image source: <https://www.ifi.org>

Israel's targeting of journalists in the context of the war in Gaza

The toll of the war on Gaza on journalists and media workers

Israel's attempts to silence media voices surrounding the war in Gaza have been mostly shown through the targeting of journalists throughout the attack on the Palestinian enclave. As of 18 August 2025, 192 journalists and media workers have been reportedly killed during the war, leading the Committee to

Protect Journalists (CJP) to deem it “the deadliest period for journalists” since 1992.⁹ According to American outlet *Democracy Now*, more journalists have been killed in Gaza than in World War I, World War II, Korea, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Afghanistan War combined.¹⁰ Killing journalists is an extreme form of press censorship, underscoring that Israeli authorities are pursuing their policy against press freedom throughout the war.



Data source: <https://cpj.org/data>

CJP also reported that at least 90 journalists have been arrested, 129 have been injured, and 2 are reportedly missing since 7 October 2023. Additionally, CJP is investigating 130 additional cases of deaths among journalists to establish whether or not their deaths were related to the war in Gaza.

The toll is especially high among local reporters: in its attempt to curtail the coverage of the atrocities in the Gaza Strip, Israel has restricted the access of foreign journalists and doesn't allow media workers to rotate in and out of the enclave. Thus, outlets have to outsource their coverage of the armed conflict to Palestinian correspondents and media workers, who remain underpaid and under-resourced, increasing the risks they face.

Deliberately targeting the press.

Two-thirds of the casualties among media workers in Gaza were caused by Israeli airstrikes. Given the indiscriminate nature of such operations, it is difficult to decipher whether or not journalists were targeted in those attacks or if they are simply victims of a ruthless war, like any other civilian in Gaza. Yet, the second cause of mortality among journalists is drone strikes. Although misidentification and collateral damage are a possibility in drone strikes, most attacks remain precisely targeted, highlighting the deliberate attacks against those wearing a blue “PRESS” bulletproof vest. For instance, Islam Al Zaanoun, a Palestinian freelance journalist, was shot in the shoulder by an Israeli drone on 3 July 2025, minutes after she completed a live report near a camp in Gaza City. Journalists and their families are also being threatened by the IOF.

⁹ [Journalist casualties in the Israel-Gaza war - CJP](#)

¹⁰ [Israel Has “Deliberate Strategy” of Killing Palestinian Journalists Like Anas al-Sharif: U.N. Expert - Democracy Now](#)

Besides the physical attacks journalists are victims of, they also face smear campaigns, aiming at dismissing and discrediting Palestinian narratives of suffering amid the ongoing genocide. Those campaigns include accusing correspondents of aiding and abetting combatants and, more generally, of being terrorists, which fosters a dangerous rhetoric against journalists and justifies striking them. It was notoriously the case in the killing of Anas al-Sharif, whom Israel accused of being the head of a Hamas terrorist cell, without evidence to back up those allegations.

Attacking media infrastructures

Aside from the death tolls among journalists, Israel has also systematically targeted media infrastructure in Gaza to limit the flow of information and images coming from the Gaza Strip¹¹. The Press House, a structure created in 2013 by Omar Shaaban, Bilal Jadallah and Rami Abu Jamous to support independent journalism in Palestine, was destroyed during the Israeli Army's occupation in February 2024, despite communicating the coordinates to Israeli military authorities. The destruction of press infrastructures shows that the media workers are not simply collateral victims of the war on Palestinians, but are being targeted to hinder the documentation of Israeli actions in Gaza.

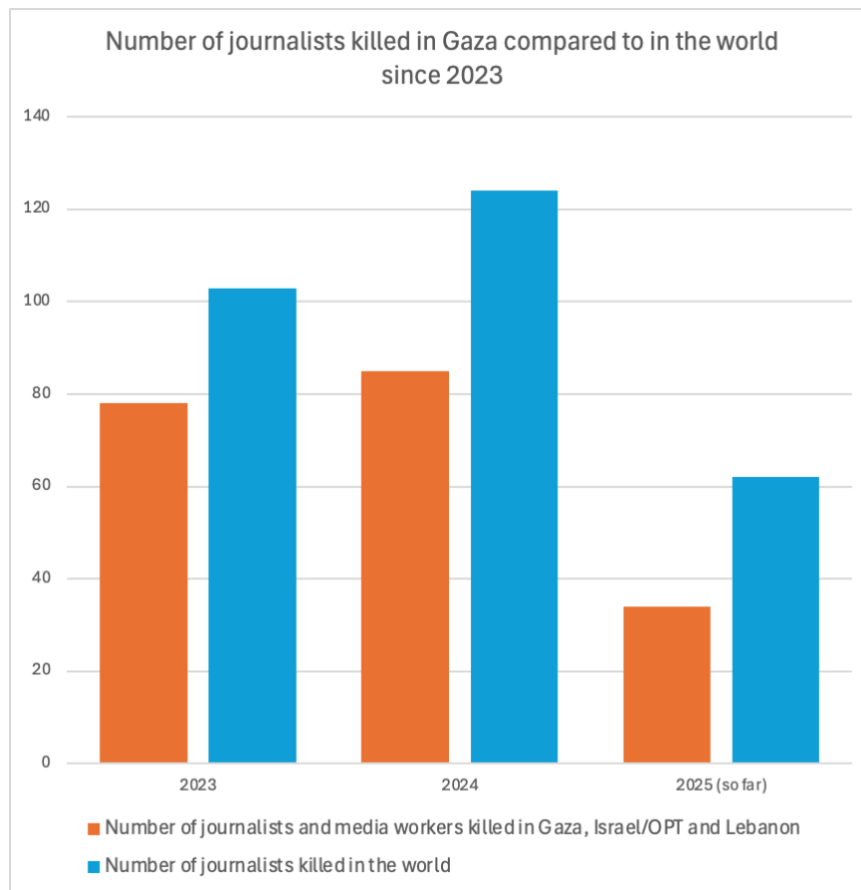
Comparing Gaza to other armed conflicts

According to OHCHR, Gaza is currently the deadliest place on earth for journalists¹², with 197 journalists and media workers killed since 7 October 2023. In 2024, 70% of all journalists killed in the world were reportedly killed in the OPT¹³, highlighting the disproportionately high casualty of this war. In comparison, only 19 members of the press have been killed in Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian invasion in February 2022, with 15 of them killed during the first year of the conflict alone.

¹¹ [A Gaza, la destruction méthodique des infrastructures médiatiques - Le Monde](#)

¹² [Killings of journalists and their family members in Gaza - OHCHR Press release](#)

¹³ [Special Report: 2024 is deadliest year for journalists in CPJ history; almost 70% killed by Israel - CPJ](#)

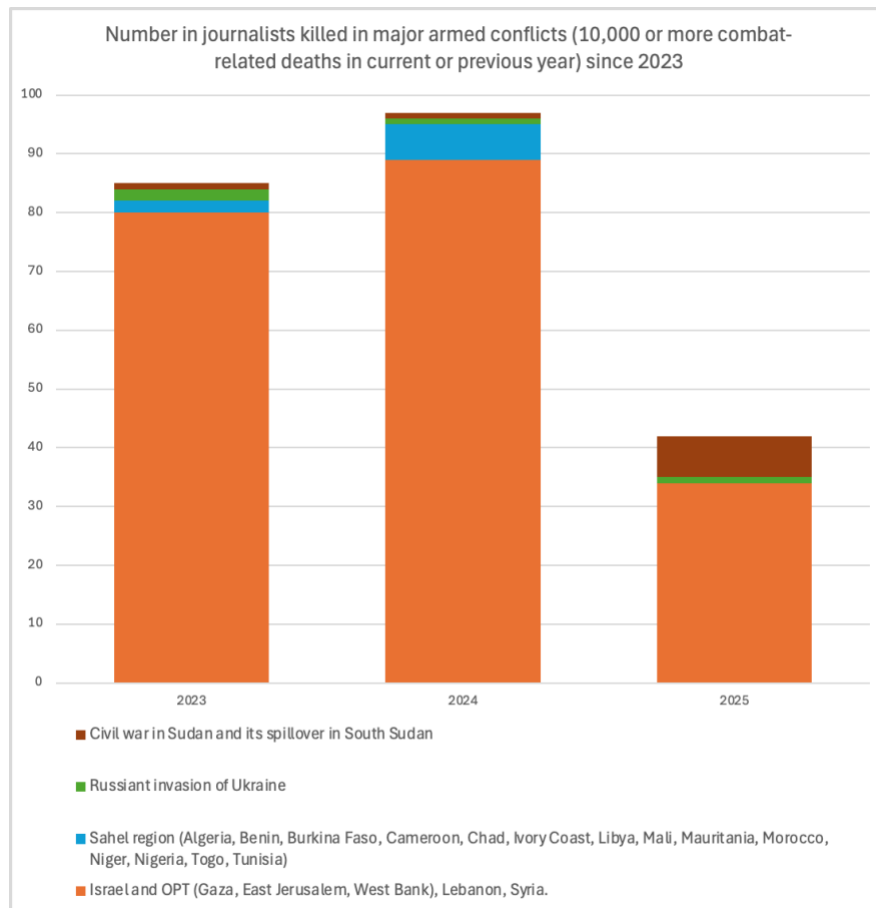


Data source: <https://cpj.org/data>

Statistics show that the conflict between Israel and Palestine, including the subsequent bombings of Lebanon and Syria, has produced the highest casualty rate, surpassing other major ongoing conflicts, namely in Ukraine, Sudan and the Sahel region. This data underscores that, in Gaza, journalists are not simply collateral, but deliberate, especially since the civilian casualty in Gaza is far from being the highest: The New York Times reported in January 2025 that over 150.000 people had been killed in Sudan since the beginning of the war in April 2023¹⁴, while Palestinian health authorities report over 60.000 deaths in the Gaza Strip since October 2023.¹⁵ In other words, while journalists represent 0,006% of the victims in the Sudanese armed conflict, they represent 0,33% of the victims in Gaza, highlighting a pattern of calculated targeting of the press in the Israeli military's strategy.

¹⁴ [Disaster by the Numbers: The Crisis in Sudan - NYT](#)

¹⁵ [How many Palestinians has Israel's Gaza offensive killed? - Reuters](#)



Data source: <https://cpj.org/data>

How does International Humanitarian Law protect journalists?

Although journalists in Gaza are disproportionately targeted by Israel, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides a legal framework that recognises them as civilians and seeks to safeguard their vital role in documenting armed conflict.

Under the Geneva Conventions and Customary IHL

IHL defines journalists as civilians, namely under Article 79 of the 1977 Protocol Additional I, relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. Accordingly, journalists and media workers enjoy the general protection granted to civilians in international armed conflicts (IAC) by the fourth Geneva Convention, unless they effectively partake in the hostilities, contributing to military action. Likewise, media facilities are regarded as civilian objects and are also protected under the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocol I, namely Article 52. This general protection requires belligerents to take precautionary measures, including abiding by the principle of proportionality in attack, the obligation to give a warning to civilians, and the adequacy of means in attacks. Thus, although they do not have absolute immunity, journalists enjoy a form of protection that is supposed to allow them to document the war.

In the case of non-international armed conflict (NIAC), meaning armed conflicts in which at least one of the parties is a non-State armed group, journalists also enjoy the general protection granted to civilians under Article 13 of the 1977 Additional Protocol II relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts. Media infrastructures, however, are not protected as civilian objects.

Yet, under customary IHL, which applies to both IAC and NIAC, journalists are also recognised as civilians and granted general protection, as long as they don't partake in the hostilities, under Rule 34.¹⁶ This rule is outlined in various military manuals, including Israel's 2006 Manual on the Rules of Warfare. Additionally, the UN Security Council Resolution 1738 on the protection of journalists during armed conflicts (2006) require UN Member States to protect journalists in both IAC and NIAC.

Therefore, although their immunity is not absolute, journalists are protected under both conventional and customary international humanitarian law, guaranteeing their ability to document the consequences of an armed conflict and report on them.

A relevant framework relying on the classification of the conflict

Classifying the war in Gaza as an IAC or a NIAC is difficult, as it in part relies on whether Palestine is recognised as a State, which is the case for 147 out of the 193 UN Member States, and on whether or not the Gaza Strip is defined as an occupied territory. The fact that Hamas is an organised armed group and the intensity of the conflict are sufficient to define the war in Gaza as a NIAC. Nonetheless, proving that the war in Gaza is an IAC allows the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocol I to apply, guaranteeing the general protection journalists enjoy as civilians. Besides, customary IHL applies to both IAC and NIAC, but it is not a binding framework.

Although Israel ratified neither Additional Protocol I nor Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, it is still obligated to abide by the Geneva Conventions it ratified in 1951.¹⁷ Thus, the protection of journalists during the war in Gaza should be guaranteed by the Hebrew State, which uses smear campaigns against Palestinian journalists to justify lifting their protection. Yet, attacks against journalists constitute war crimes under both the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute, which was ratified by the State of Palestine, making accountability possible.

¹⁶ [Rule 34 - ICRC Customary IHL Database](#)

¹⁷ [Treaties and State Parties - IHL Databases](#)

Conclusion

Israel's systematic targeting of journalists during the war in Gaza highlights the extent to which freedom of the press is under assault. By silencing Palestinian reporters and restricting access for international media, Israel not only conceals the realities of its military operations from the world but also curtails information among Israelis, limiting their understanding of the war and furthering the government's narrative of victimhood. This deliberate suppression of independent voices has profound consequences, allowing disinformation and propaganda to flourish in place of accountability.

At the same time, the legal protections enshrined in International Humanitarian Law should guarantee journalists' safety, yet they remain largely disregarded on the ground. Their deliberate targeting not only violates IHL but also undermines the international community's ability to monitor and respond to mass atrocities. Recognising this gap, Irene Khan, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of the Press, has advocated for journalists covering armed conflicts to be recognised as humanitarian workers, thus granting them an elevated level of protection. Such a shift would acknowledge their vital role in documenting conflict, ensuring transparency, and giving voice to those most affected.

Ultimately, protecting journalists is not merely a matter of upholding professional rights; it is central to defending truth amid war. Without safeguarding their work, the world risks losing one of the last remaining tools to confront impunity and preserve the historical record of Gaza's devastation.

GICJ's position on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts

The **Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)** reiterates its strong condemnation of the deliberate targeting of journalists in the OPT, especially in the Gaza Strip. Assassinating journalists is a silencing of the brave and resilient men and women covering the ongoing war and genocide, despite personal loss, the threats against their families' lives and their own. GICJ is appalled by Israel's recurring smear campaigns against Palestinian journalists, accusing them of being terrorists to justify targeting them. Systematically killing civilians amounts to war crimes under the Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, and the Rome Statute. GICJ thus urges the International Criminal Court to investigate those war crimes, regarding the situation in the State of Palestine, to bring an end to the impunity those targeting journalists and media workers enjoy.

GICJ calls on Israel to:

- respect the principles of military necessity, distinction, proportionality, humanity, and honour, and abide by military laws and international humanitarian law, whether conventional or customary;
- uphold UN Security Council Resolution 1738 on the protection of journalists during armed conflicts, and more generally, all UN resolutions regarding the OPT;
- repeal laws limiting the freedom of the press, including the November 2023 amendment to the Counter-Terrorism law and the May 2024 ban on foreign media, and guarantee the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and the right to receive information.

Finally, GICJ urges the international community to take immediate action to protect journalists and media workers in conflict zones, not only in Gaza but also in all other conflict zones, including in Ukraine and Sudan. This protection includes the recognition of journalists covering armed conflicts as humanitarian workers, aligning with Special Rapporteur Khan's recommendations. GICJ additionally calls on the UN to establish an independent working group or an independent fact-finding mission to

investigate this blatant violation of IHL and the human right of freedom of expression in the OPT, to end impunity for killing journalists.

About GICJ

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting and reinforcing commitments to the principles and norms of human rights. GICJ is based in Geneva, Switzerland and is governed by the Swiss Civil Code and its statutes.

GICJ's mission is to improve lives by tackling violations and all forms of violence and degrading or inhumane treatment through the strengthening of respect for human rights: reinforcing the independence of lawyers and judiciaries; consolidating the principles of equality and non-discrimination; ensuring the rule of law is upheld; promoting a culture of awareness of human rights; and combating impunity. GICJ collaborates with a coalition of NGOs on the ground and around the world, which provide accurate and up-to-date information on violations. GICJ also works with networks of academics, lawyers and experts who contribute their knowledge and expertise on relevant issues and cases.



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