

# **Media Statement**



## **Comment by UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk on widespread destruction by Israeli Defence Forces of civilian infrastructure in Gaza**

Geneva, 8 February 2024

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are reportedly destroying all buildings within the Gaza Strip that are within a kilometre of the Israel-Gaza fence, clearing the area with the objective of creating a “buffer zone”. I stress to the Israeli authorities that Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits destruction by the Occupying Power of property belonging to private persons “except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations”.

Destructions carried out to create a “buffer zone” for general security purposes do not appear consistent with the narrow “military operations” exception set out in international humanitarian law. Further, extensive destruction of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly, amounts to a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and a war crime.

Since late October 2023, my Office has recorded widespread destruction and demolition by the IDF of civilian and other infrastructure, including residential buildings, schools and universities in areas in which fighting is not or no longer taking place. Such demolitions are also occurring in Beit Hanoun in North Gaza, As Shujaiyeh in Gaza City, and An Nuseirat Camp in Middle Gaza. Demolitions have been reported from other areas as well, with reports of destruction of many residential buildings and blocks taking place in Khan Younis in recent weeks.

Israel has not provided cogent reasons for such extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Such destruction of homes and other essential civilian infrastructure also results in the permanent displacement of communities that were living in these areas prior to the escalation in hostilities, and appears to be aimed at or has the effect of rendering the return of civilians to these areas impossible. I remind the authorities that forcible transfer of civilians may constitute a war crime.

ENDS