

International News Safety Institute (INSI) issues Gaza press safety advisory, calls for UN probe into Israeli targeting of media



BRUSSELS, January 15 (INSI)—The *International News Safety Institute* today launched a Gaza safety advice service on its website. This is aimed at providing the news media with a running update from the ground of safety-related information during the crisis.

Any news organisation or individual with useful information to contribute to this service should email *INSI* Director Rodney Pinder rodney.pinder@newssafety.org or Deputy Director Sarah de Jong sarah.dejong@newssafety.org

Since Last December, at least 4 Palestinian journalists have been killed in different circumstances:

- I. December 26, 2008: Hamza Shahin, a photographer with *Shehab News Agency*, died two weeks after he was wounded in an Israeli air attack on December 7 in northern Gaza.
- II. January 6, 2009: Basel Faraj, who worked as a cameraman for the Algerian TV network *ENTV* and the *Palestine Broadcast Production Company*, was wounded in an Israeli air strike on December 27. He died on January 6. He was filming in Gaza with reporters Mohamed Madi and Mohamed Al Tanany and *Morocco Channel 2* cameraman, Khaled Abu Shammala all of whom were wounded in the attack.

- III. January 7, 2009: Eyhab Al Wahidi , a cameraman for the *Palestinian Broadcast Corporation* in Gaza, was killed with his wife and mother in law when Israeli troops shelled their home in Gaza city. The family's children were wounded.
- IV. January 9, 2009: Journalist Ala Mortaji died from injuries received when his house was hit by fire from an Israeli tank during an assault on the Zaitoun district. He was working in the Gaza Strip for a local radio. The house of another local journalist, Samir Khalifah, was also hit.

Several buildings housing media have been bombed:

Reuters reported on Thursday January 15 that an explosion blasted a tower block in the city of Gaza on Thursday that houses the offices of *Reuters* and several other media organisations. A journalist for the *Abu Dhabi television* channel was reported wounded.

Reuters journalists working there at the time said an Israeli missile or shell appeared to have struck the southern side of the 13th floor of the Al-Shurouq Tower in the city centre.

Reuters evacuated the bureau. Colleagues said at least one journalist working for *Abu Dhabi television* on the 14th floor was wounded.

Reuters journalists on the spot said they had not been aware of any presence of armed men in the building beforehand. An Israeli army spokesman had spoken with *Reuters* staff in Jerusalem shortly before the explosion to check the location of the *Reuters* bureau in Gaza. *Reuters* had provided the coordinates of its office to the army at the start of the war and was assured on several occasions that it was not a target.

An army spokeswoman said after the blast that she was checking. She said troops were engaged with Hamas guerrillas in exchanges of fire in the city and said fighters had taken over a media office in the same area late on Wednesday.

Israelis accused of targeting news media

The *International Federation of Journalists* (IFJ) and the *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ), both *INSI* members, earlier had accused the Israeli military of targeting Palestinian news media in the Gaza Strip while maintaining a ban on foreign journalists from entering the territory.

The *CPJ*, quoting regional news agencies, said Israeli forces on January 12 fired two missiles into the offices of the Hamas-affiliated *Al-Risala* news weekly and a few minutes later bombed *al-Rantisi* printers, a commercial firm which publishes *Al-Risala*.

The *IFJ* said Israeli aircraft attacked the television station *Al-Aqsa* on December 28 and on January 9 staged a double air strike on the Al-Johara Tower in Gaza City. The

building, a base for up to 20 news organisations, was clearly marked as housing media staff.

The *Palestine Journalists Syndicate* (PJS) says Israeli forces have targeted vehicles and journalists identified as such with prominent “Press” or “TV” markings.

Logistical problems faced by the media

Jan. 6—Palestinian media personnel spoke to *Reporters Without Borders* today by telephone about the problems being encountered by their reporters in the Gaza Strip. “One of our biggest problems is getting about within the territory,” *Ma’an* news agency executive director Raed Othman said.

“As regards their personal safety, most of the journalists prefer not to wear bullet-proof vests for fear of becoming targets,” Othman continued. “There is also a problem with sources. Both sides, Israel and Hamas, have activated their propaganda machines, which makes it hard to verify information. In the absence of independent sources, rumours and informal networks are growing. Many people based in Gaza continue to post blog entries.”

Wafa news agency journalist Khader Moussa told *Reporters Without Borders*: “Power cuts and phone line cuts are frequent. Most of our correspondents are forced to go to their offices to take advantage of the few power sources available, although many would rather stay at home and not risk being killed on the road.”

General information indicates that it is almost impossible for anyone, including journalists to move around. There are also severe electricity restrictions.

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AFP: Hardened Gaza reporter living through nightmare of latest war

GAZA CITY, Jan 15, 2009 (AFP)—Adel Zaanoun thought himself hardened after 16 years of covering the violence in Gaza as a reporter for AFP. But the past three weeks of Israel's war on Hamas have been the most terrifying of his life. "Each time I've left home, I've not known whether I would return," he says.

Particularly shocking was a visit to Al-Shifa hospital the night Israel began bombing the Gaza Strip on December 27. "I thought I was unshockable after years covering the tragedy of Gaza as part of AFP's team of reporters here, but I was still taken aback by the mess at Al-Shifa hospital on the first night of the bombing.

"There was blood, pieces of flesh and body parts strewn everywhere; women and children, as well as Hamas fighters. It was the stuff of nightmares.

"As a reporter in Gaza for the best part of a decade and a half, I've often had to dash to Al-Shifa, the main hospital in Gaza City, at all times of day and night to cover the aftermath of Israeli airstrikes, and have grown used to working in conditions that few reporters can imagine.

"But there's no doubt that the last three weeks have been the hardest so far of my professional career.

"There was blood, pieces of flesh and body parts strewn everywhere; women and children, as well as Hamas fighters. It was the stuff of nightmares."

"I've also never had to work in such trying conditions. Although we are used to power cuts here, they usually only last for a few hours, and the phone lines have been cut pretty much most of the time.

"Usually I have to phone through a few quotes and bits of colour to the news desk in Jerusalem by cell phone. The vital thing is to make sure that I recharge the batteries of my laptop and cell phone whenever the power does come back on, however briefly.

"Getting hold of anyone from Hamas is pretty much impossible at times as all the leaders have gone into hiding. Occasionally they do reply but only very briefly with short sharp phrases and no time for pleasantries. Sometimes they might send me a text message.

"Trying to report on the ground is very, very risky with the Israelis firing all the time.

"I've been down to Rafah in the south, where some of the worst of the fighting has been, on a number of occasions. Even though it's winter I drive with the windows down to avoid glass smashing into my face if there's a really big explosion.

"The most terrifying moment came when I was interviewing a man who called himself Abu Ali in a small house in a cemetery in Rafah.

"The Israelis had just bombed six smuggling tunnels that he had been operating and he was convinced that they were after him and trying to kill him.

"At that point, an F-16 passed overhead and he ran away as fast as he could. I leapt into my car and raced back to Gaza City—only to find they were bombing there as well.

“I have to admit I’ve come under a lot of pressure from my wife Oula who keeps on calling me to see whether I really have to go to a particular place, sometimes in tears. My mother has also been calling me, saying she’s been praying for me.

“I’ve got three young boys and of course my number one priority is to protect my family. It’s worst at night as we haven’t got any windows left. The building in front of my apartment was hit by an Israeli rocket last week.

“I’ve now rented another apartment and moved there with my wife and kids as well as my parents and two of my sisters-in-law, so there are nine of us. We’ve got no beds, no furniture, nothing but at least I think it’s a bit safer.

“Like most of my colleagues, I think it’s going to be all over in a day or two. No one thinks it’s going to go on much longer.”

Reuters: Two weeks under fire in Gaza

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

Before the Reuters bureau was hit

Voices get loud and excited over the radio Reuters news crews use in Gaza to call in the latest information. Some people complain there are no “Western reporters” inside. But we all work for Reuters, a global agency that sets the international standard.

“We have a fixed camera on our high-rise building but our cameramen are being cautious not to point their cameras from the windows, in case they are mistaken for weapons.”

After two full weeks of bombardment we are all worried about our families but we work and work the story. We hope it will stop.

“They bombed a car in Beit Lahiyah,” says one colleague working in northern Gaza.

“Three dead arrived in Shifa hospital,” says another in Gaza’s largest hospital.

“Several people were injured when Israeli planes bombed the tunnels,” said a third from southern Gaza Strip near the border with Egypt.

I field these calls in our office where we have put duct tape crosses on every window to limit flying glass if a strike is too close. Still, the largest window in the hall was blown out.

We have a fixed camera on our high-rise building but our cameramen are being cautious not to point their cameras from the windows, in case they are mistaken for weapons. (Such mistakes were given as the reasons why a US tank blasted our Baghdad bureau in 2003, killing and wounding colleagues, and was also the reason given for an Israeli tank killing our colleague here in Gaza, Fadel Shana, nine months ago).

The camera can show the blue Mediterranean sea a few blocks to the west, or point the other way to where Israeli ground forces are closing in, perhaps little more than a kilometre away. At night it used to show bright lights and traffic.

Now it is empty streets and a few cold electric lights. Nothing much moves after dark these days. And we choose, for safety reasons, not to stay in the bureau overnight. We look after our families and keep in touch

with contacts and colleagues by phone, ready to head out and film if necessary.

We all get to the office around 9 A.M.—typically about 10 of us, with another dozen colleagues working in other parts of the Gaza Strip. The strikes have usually been going on for a few hours by then. We call that information in to our bureau in Jerusalem where colleagues have been updating our main report around the clock. The updates go on all day long.

I often have no time to write up stories myself. It all moves so fast. I use two land phones, an Israeli mobile phone, and a Palestinian mobile phone that is intermittent.

Inside Gaza, we use text messages to communicate. We have to monitor local television and radio stations because they are often first with developments that we race to check. Those checks are essential, of course. The mixture of confusion and deliberate propaganda that accompanies any war, means that our standards of cross-checking everything and ensuring readers understand the sources of information need to be rigorous.

Every day is a new life written for me and for my family and also for the Reuters team in Gaza. Shelling and air strikes have hardly spared any place in the whole Gaza Strip. The heart of the city of Gaza has been hit several times.

Some areas seem to have been hit simply because a Hamas policeman walked nearby, or some militants were detected at a street corner by the Israeli forces. The high-explosive attack that follows can be

devastating, taking out not only targeted people but a house or some passers-by.

The movement of our crews is restricted to hospitals and major strikes at places that are important, or where we think there may have been a high death toll. It is simply too dangerous to do otherwise. We cannot be with Hamas leaders or accompany the fighters to film them since that would be too great a risk.

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“Please take care. Do not enter a place right after it is bombed. Wait a bit, it may be hit again.” This is a warning I issue to our crews 30 times a day.

We urge our cameramen and photographers to avoid main roads outside the city, and to look carefully where they drive.

“Try not to pass by a police station even it was already bombed. Do not go by a money exchange shop, or a house of a Hamas leader. Do not pass by a place the Israel army has threatened to bomb. Avoid passing close to a mosque.”

This is also my daily advice to myself — a list I repeat mentally as I drive back and forth.

Inside the office we have breakfast together, lunch too sometimes, and we send meals to people on outside missions. At one stage we did not see our outside crews for almost five days. When they returned to the office there was a big welcome scene. We hugged one another and thanked God we were safe, that all of us were safe.

Four journalists have been killed since the offensive began. One worked for Algerian and Moroccan television, another two for local Gaza broadcasters. The fourth was the special presidential cameraman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

When the main security complex was hit, 200 metres from our office, a piece of shrapnel penetrated the wall of our TV production room and made a hole. Part of the ceiling broke but everybody was safe. Many times we have ducked under the tables when huge blasts from air strikes shook the office. We also hear the whistle of outgoing Gaza rockets fired at Israel from inside the city.

Our families are our main concern.

I live in the south west side of Gaza City, not far from the sea, and the sounds of explosions in the district in the street have never ceased for 14 days of war. We've had almost no electricity for 10 days. For safety, my wife, daughter and son squeeze all day into our little hallway, listening to the news on a transistor radio. When one goes to the toilet, they all go together. One goes into the bathroom, the rest wait just outside.

For 14 days we have been sleeping in the same room, which we thought was away from the street and would be safe. But the whole building shook with every explosion and my wife had to leave our bed and hug the kids, sleeping on mattresses. My kids cover their ears a lot of the time when explosions start. My daily lectures about safety—that we are far from what is happening — seem pretty useless.

“Try not to pass by a police station...a money exchange shop...a house of a Hamas leader...a place the Israel army has threatened to bomb...a mosque.”

On Thursday the children realised I was just trying to make things easier. An Israeli missile hit a house across the street where we lived and killed a journalist, his wife and his mother-in-law. I was still working and my wife called to tell me and I could hear the children crying in the background. I had to check a colour story by-lined in my name by Reuters in Jerusalem.

The colleagues there told me to go home and to be with my family, which must be the top priority before anything else.

We have to leave the office before it is too late at night because the streets are empty and scary. Restaurants are closed and bakeries crowded by people in the daytime. One baker helped out with a special delivery, grateful for the work of journalists.

Our Reuters colleagues in Jerusalem are far away but they have some visual contact via our live television monitor, so they can see the smoke, dust and flames caused by Israeli bombing in Gaza. They can get some of the atmosphere. We also have many colleagues on Israel's border with the Gaza Strip, just a few kilometres from our office here, watching and filming the bombs landing around us and the rockets being fired at Israel.

It is hard to get accurate statistics from independent parties on how many fighters have died. Hamas spokesmen do not answer that question. Our cameramen rarely cover funerals of gunmen of Hamas, it is too dangerous. The Israeli army says it has killed “hundreds” of fighters. From the tolls we are compiling from the hospitals, hundreds of civilians have also died.

On Friday Jan 9, an air strike hit a TV production and transmission facility about

100 metres from our office. At least one person was hurt and there was considerable damage. It was used by several Arab TV stations and Iran's Press TV. The Israeli army said the building was not a target but may have sustained "collateral damage"—and they assured us they have the coordinates of the Reuters bureau and that we are not a target. It is worrying nonetheless.

INSI backs calls for UN to probe Israeli targeting of media in Gaza

BRUSSELS, January 14—The *International News Safety Institute* today backed a call by the *International Federation of Journalists* for the United Nations to investigate the targeting of media by Israeli forces in Gaza.

Israeli military actions in Gaza appear to amount to a clear violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1738 which demands all parties in armed conflict comply with their obligations under international law to protect civilians, including journalists.

The resolution, passed unanimously in 2006 after a two-year campaign by the IFJ, INSI and the *European Broadcasting Union*, condemns intentional attacks against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict, and calls upon all parties to put an end to such practices.

It points out that media equipment and installations constitute civilian objects, "and in this respect shall not be the object of attack or of reprisals, unless they are military objectives." The full text of the resolution is on INSI's website <http://www.newssafety.org/>

The IFJ statement, on <http://www.ifj.org/>, said a letter had been sent to UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon saying Israel was defying its obligations under Resolution 1738.

The IFJ and the *Committee to Protect Journalists*, both INSI members, have accused the Israeli military of targeting Palestinian news media in the Gaza Strip while maintaining a ban on foreign journalists from entering the territory.

The CPJ, quoting regional news agencies, said Israeli forces on Monday fired two missiles into the offices of the Hamas-affiliated Al-Risala news weekly and a few minutes later bombed al-Rantisi printers, a commercial firm which publishes Al-Risala.

The IFJ said Israeli aircraft attacked the television station Al-Aqsa on 28 December and on 9 January staged a double air strike on the Al-Johara Tower in Gaza City. The building, a base for up to 20 news organisations, was clearly marked as housing media staff.

The *Palestine Journalists Syndicate* (PJS) says Israeli forces have targeted vehicles and journalists identified as such with prominent "Press" or "TV" markings.

“Resolution 1738 was a landmark development in efforts to protect the news media in conflict zones. Once again we call for it to be observed in letter and in spirit. The United Nations must hold its members to account in this crucial matter,” said INSI Director Rodney Pinder.

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Any questions on this news release should be addressed to Rodney Pinder email rodney.pinder@newssafety.org or mobile +44 7734 709267

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