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Report Gaza - January 2009

"Set against hundreds of casualties, including many civilians, the toll of violations of press freedom during operation 'Cast Lead' in Gaza, might appear small. But news was another casualty of this war. The sealing off of the Gaza Strip, which was the full responsibility of the Israeli authorities, is unacceptable and disturbing. Beyond this conflict, control of news in time of war has become a military objective throughout the world. Now it has become the norm", said Reporters Without Borders, as it released its report on violations of press freedom during the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip, in January 2009.

"Hamas is also responsible for serious press freedom violations. Contrary to what its leaders say, journalists are not free to criticise the Islamist movement, to communicate the stance of other factions or simply to set forth divergent opinions. Most journalists who spoke to Reporters Without Borders in Gaza share this point of view, but none of them can express themselves publicly, so great is the risk of reprisals," stressed the organisation, which has recorded 28 journalists arrested by Hamas forces for their political opinions, since it took control of Gaza in June 2007.

Reporters Without Borders went to Israel and the Gaza Strip at the end of January to establish a tally of press freedom violations during this conflict. After investigating on the spot, Reporters Without Borders puts at six the number of journalists who were killed, two of them while doing their job. Around 15 were wounded. And at least three buildings housing media were hit by Israeli fire.

In the report, Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns all attacks carried out by the Israeli Army against buildings housing Palestinian or foreign media and calls on the Israeli Army and government to rapidly provide detailed explanations for hits on these buildings.

"The United Nations should demand to take part in these investigations and non-governmental organisations should also be involved. Reporters Without Borders now expresses its wish to contribute to this independently. Other investigations carried out by the Israeli Army in the past into the deaths of journalists or bombing of media have had highly reprehensible results, in the process exonerating soldiers of all responsibility", writes the organisation in concluding its report. Reporters Without Borders believes that, since the launch of the second Intifada in September 2000, the number of journalists killed has reached seven and more than 100 were wounded.

Reporters Without Borders maintains that the closing of the Gaza Strip to the press constituted a serious and unacceptable violation of press freedom. On this too, the organisation strongly urges the United Nations to adopt a resolution immediately calling on Israel to stop using such coercive methods to control news.

The organisation proposes that, with the agreement of the Israeli authorities, press equipment should be sent to the Gaza Strip. This equipment is today sadly lacking : film cameras, tapes, cameras, editing equipment, generators were all damaged or destroyed. Since Israel controls all goods that get into the Gaza Strip, Reporters Without Borders calls on the state of Israel to show discretion in its control of equipment entering the Gaza Strip. Equipment that is essential to the press should benefit from the same conditions as humanitarian supplies.

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world. It has nine national sections (Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). It has representatives in Bangkok, London, New York, Tokyo and Washington. And it has more than 120 correspondents worldwide.