

Thursday, 02 July 2009

Tel Aviv accuses rights group of "manipulation" by Hamas Israel's Gaza war crimes not "collateral damage"



Human Rights Watch reports written in English, Hebrew and Arabic on the 22-day Israeli offensive in Gaza

DUBAI (Al Arabiya)

Israel sought to defend itself Thursday against the latest accusations by a major international organization that it committed war crimes against people in Gaza, claiming that the Islamist group Hamas manipulated the group responsible for the most recent report.

Amnesty's report

The London-based Amnesty International accused Israel forces of war crimes, including using children as human shield and launching wanton attacks against civilians during its 22-day offensive in Gaza

The 117-page report on Operation Cast Lead came on the heels of reports by the International Committee for the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch that similarly found evidence Israel committed war crimes in Gaza.

"The death of so many children and other civilians cannot be dismissed simply as 'collateral damage' as argued by Israel," said Donatella Rovera, head of a field research mission in Gaza and Southern Israel during and after the attacks.

The Israel Defense Force (IDF) refuted the accusations and claimed Amnesty had succumbed to the "manipulations of the Hamas terror organization."

Israel's reaction

The IDF said Amnesty's report was "unbalanced," because it "focuses so intently on any and all IDF infractions, and ignores the blatant violations of international law perpetrated by Hamas."

"The Amnesty report ignores a critical aspect of Operation Cast Lead - Hamas consistently, deliberately and routinely violated International Law, specifically the prohibition against the use of human shields," the Israeli statement insisted.

Israel said its forces "operated throughout the fighting in accordance with international law, maintaining high ethical and professional standards" except in certain cases that said were "unavoidable during combat."

Though the human rights group stated it could not find evidence of Hamas using civilians as human shields, it held Hamas and other Palestinian armed organizations responsible for war crimes as well and urged them to stop all rocket attacks on Israel civilian centers.