

# Israeli army blatantly violates human rights

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AL QUDS: A 14-year-old boy throws a stone at a fortified army post in the Gaza Strip, and Israeli soldiers shoot him dead. A cabdriver drops off a grocery sack left in his taxi, and troops riddle his body with bullets. Two peasant women and a teenager are killed by tiny darts that pierce their chests and stomachs when Israeli tanks shell their refugee camp.

From the start, Israeli, Palestinian and international human-rights organizations have charged that the Israeli army has often used disproportionate force in putting down demonstrations and retaliating for Palestinian attacks. In case after case, the army has killed Palestinian civilians but has only rarely investigated the deaths or punished the soldiers and officers responsible. Most killings are given cursory, on-site review and, if any fault is found, chalked up to justifiable error or the fog of war. Fuller inquiry is seldom pursued.

Many Israelis want the conflict to end and say they do not care what the army and government do to achieve that aim. A small number of influential Israelis - including the deans of the country's four leading law schools - have joined the chorus of criticism, worrying about the corrosive effect that ignoring abuse can have on the morale and discipline of the Middle East's most powerful military and on society as a whole.

Few cases have incensed human-rights watchdogs like that of Khalil Mughrabi. The 11-year-old Gazan boy was shot in the head by Israeli soldiers, the army acknowledges, as he took a break after a soccer match in July. He died, and two of his friends, ages 10 and 12, were

wounded. Internal army documents confirm that the troops - who earlier had come under Palestinian gunfire - fired "warning shots" in the direction of the children, using a high-calibre, tank-mounted machine gun, despite regulations prohibiting the shooting of heavy weaponry at children.

No longer able to work in Israel because of a ban on Palestinian workers, Radwan Shtyyeh, 37, drove a small yellow cab on the West Bank roads near Nablus to earn a little money - 20 or 30 shekels a day, not even \$10. On the day he was killed, his four children had asked him for new shoes. So he made another taxi run, carrying four passengers up a dirt road on the edge of his village, Salem, and depositing them so they could walk the rest of the way around a barricade erected by the Israeli army.

But one of the passengers left a bag of vegetables in the cab. Shtyyeh, an amiable man described as wholly uninterested in politics, got out of the car, carried the bag up to the barricade and placed it in the road so the woman could retrieve it. Israeli soldiers halfway up a nearby hill, at least 50 yards away, opened fire. Bullets hit his upper body in at least eight places, according to his family, witnesses and a Palestinian coroner.

Two of his young sons, herding sheep in a nearby pasture, watched in horror as their father was killed, as did several other Salem residents. "I went down to help, but the soldiers wouldn't let us get any closer," recalled Jihad Shtyyeh, a distant cousin and the first on the scene that afternoon of July 2. "He was still alive, saying,

"Help me, Help me." But the soldiers yelled at us to go away."

In the Palestinian town of Khan Yunis, an Israeli army outpost rises up from the scruffy sand dunes. It is a heavily fortified bunker. It is not likely that Imad Zareb and the other youths who were pelting it with stones on Sept 15 posed much of a threat. Imad, 14, and the others had attended the funeral of two Palestinians killed by Israeli fire. They broke off from the burial procession as it entered the Khan Yunis cemetery and headed for the nearest Israeli military structure, erected to protect Jewish settlers in Gaza, who are often attacked. Imad was about 10 yards east of the outpost when Israeli soldiers opened fire with M-16 assault rifles. The teenager was hit in the chest by a bullet. He died about four hours after he was shot.

Rania Kharoufeh, a 24-year-old mother of two, needed milk for her children. In a friend's car, she made a dash for the nearest corner market the next day. The car came under fire, and Kharoufeh panicked. She jumped out of the car and took cover in a store. Within minutes, she was dead, killed by Israeli fire.

Yael Stein, the head researcher at B'Tselem an Israeli human rights organization, said that the army had violated humanitarian law repeatedly in its treatment of Palestinians. A failure to investigate, she said, encourages continued abuse. The opening of 15 investigations, in the context of the thousands of people who have been killed and wounded, "is nothing," she said.— Dawn/LAT-WP News Service (c) Los Angeles Times.