

Call for inquiry into Gaza war

By Donald Macintyre in Jerusalem

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The European Union has been urged to call for an independent inquiry into possible war crimes committed during Israel's 22-day military offensive in Gaza.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) wrote to EU foreign ministers to seek their backing for an inquiry into its "allegations of serious violations of international law [by Israel and Hamas]... which may constitute war crimes". The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights estimates that 1,434 Palestinians, including 960 civilians, were killed in the offensive.

Alleged violations by Israel include using 155mm artillery and white phosphorus in built-up areas.

HRW says it has documented six cases in which troops fired on groups of Palestinians holding white flags. And it claims Israel used an "unjustifiably expansive definition" of military targets to attack civilian facilities connected to Hamas.

The letter accused Hamas and other Palestinian groups of committing war crimes by launching hundreds of rockets into Israel, killing three Israelis since 27 December. It says Hamas's use of civilian homes and areas to monitor or attack Israeli forces violates requirements to protect civilians.

Mark Regev, spokesman for the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, said the military had attempted to protect civilians by acting "as surgically as possible".

* The right-wing nationalist Avigdor Lieberman emerged as a likely foreign minister after signing a coalition deal with Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/call-for-inquiry-into-gaza-war-1646530.html>