

Rights groups: IDF subjected Gaza detainees to deplorable conditions

By Tomer Zarchin

28 January 2009

Haaretz

Seven human rights organizations approached Israel Defense Forces Military Advocate General Avihai Mandelblit and Attorney General Menachem Mazuz on Wednesday seeking an investigation into the IDF's treatment of Palestinians detained during Israel's Gaza offensive.

The human rights groups argued that the detainees were treated in a deplorable manner and were subjected to humiliating conditions from the moment they were seized and up until being transferred to the custody of the Israel Prisons Service.

In a letter, composed by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, B'Tselem and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel among others, it was argued that the detainees had testified to the difficult conditions they faced during the first days of their imprisonment. According to the testimonies, minors and adults were held in ditches dug in dirt for hours, sometimes days, exposing the detainees to the elements while handcuffed and blindfolded. The testimonies also suggested that food and shelter were not always made available to the detainees.

Even after the detainees were taken out of the ditches, the letter argued, the detainees were held inside a truck for an entire night, handcuffed, with one blanket for every two people. They suffered violence and humiliation at the hand of IDF soldiers and investigators, the letter went on to suggest.

The rights groups went on to argue that after the detainees were transferred to a military detention facility, they were denied showers and bathroom facilities. In light of the testimonies given by the Palestinian detainees, the rights groups are seeking an independent investigation into the complaints. They maintain that the testimonies signify only a small fraction of the information beginning to emerge regarding the treatment of Gaza detainees including conditions and interrogation methods during the fighting in the region.

"The testimonies leave no room for doubt regarding the explicit violations of basic the obligation to ensure that a man, any man, will be held under suitable detention conditions while upholding his dignity and his physical wellbeing and maintaining external supervision over his treatment. This to ensure that he is not subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment," the groups wrote.