

UN Watch Oral Statement
Delivered by Colonel Richard Kemp
UN Human Rights Council
12th Special Session, 16 October 2009
Debate on Goldstone Report

Thank you, Mr. President.

I am the former commander of the British forces in Afghanistan. I served with NATO and the United Nations; commanded troops in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Macedonia; and participated in the Gulf War. I spent considerable time in Iraq since the 2003 invasion, and worked on international terrorism for the UK Government's Joint Intelligence Committee.

Mr. President, based on my knowledge and experience, I can say this: During Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli Defence Forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare.

Israel did so while facing an enemy that deliberately positioned its military capability behind the human shield of the civilian population.

Hamas, like Hizballah, are expert at driving the media agenda. Both will always have people ready to give interviews condemning Israeli forces for war crimes. They are adept at staging and distorting incidents.

The IDF faces a challenge that we British do not have to face to the same extent. It is the automatic, Pavlovian presumption by many in the international media, and international human rights groups, that the IDF are in the wrong, that they are abusing human rights.

The truth is that the IDF took extraordinary measures to give Gaza civilians notice of targeted areas, dropping over 2 million leaflets, and making over 100,000 phone calls. Many missions that could have taken out Hamas military capability were aborted to prevent civilian casualties. During the conflict, the IDF allowed huge amounts of humanitarian aid into Gaza. To deliver aid virtually into your enemy's hands is, to the military tactician, normally quite unthinkable. But the IDF took on those risks.

Despite all of this, of course innocent civilians were killed. War is chaos and full of mistakes. There have been mistakes by the British, American and other forces in Afghanistan and in Iraq, many of which can be put down to human error. But mistakes are not war crimes.

More than anything, the civilian casualties were a consequence of Hamas' way of fighting. Hamas deliberately tried to sacrifice their own civilians.

Mr. President, Israel had no choice apart from defending its people, to stop Hamas from attacking them with rockets.

And I say this again: the IDF did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare.

Thank you, Mr. President.