



Human Rights Watch
Oral Statement

1 June 2010

Urgent Debate

Thank you Mr. President

Human Rights Watch is deeply concerned at the death of at least 10 activists after Israeli security forces boarded ships that were part of an "aid flotilla" to Gaza. The incident, in which dozens of activists and several Israeli commandos were also reportedly wounded, raises grave concerns about possible unlawful and excessive use of lethal force.

The United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials provide that authorities shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. The Principles provide that if the lawful use of force and firearms is unavoidable, then the authorities must use restraint and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offense. Lethal force may be used only when strictly unavoidable to protect life. The Basic Principles also call for an effective reporting and review process, especially in cases of death and serious injury.

Mr. President, a prompt, credible and impartial investigation into the incident is essential to determine whether the lethal force used by Israeli commandos was necessary to protect lives and whether it could have been avoided. Given Israel's poor track record of investigating unlawful killings by its armed forces, the international community should closely monitor any inquiry to ensure it meets basic international standards and that any wrongdoers are brought to justice

We call on Israel to grant all detained and injured flotilla members immediate access to counsel and their families, and to disclose the identities of all those injured and killed. According to the flotilla's organizers, Israeli authorities have denied those detained in Ashdod port access to their lawyers, and have yet to disclose where the injured have been hospitalized. All communications from the flotilla and flotilla members have apparently been blocked, and the names of those killed have not been released.

Mr. President, I cannot conclude without raising Human Rights Watch's serious concern about the double standards of many of the member states that have called for this session. We are concerned not because they called for this session, but because many of them have opposed or argued against the Human Rights Council taking strong action in other situations where human life has been lost. Human rights violations are deplorable wherever they take place and whoever the perpetrator. We call on those states to honor the mandate of this body. The civilian lives lost in Thailand, Iran, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Somalia, and many other places in the world also merit the council's attention. Their killing should also be condemned and adequately investigated.

