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ACRI Report to the UN Special Rapporteur
on the use of Less-Lethal Weapons in East Jerusalem

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) is honored to submit a report to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, in preparation for his report to the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. This report focuses on the use of less-lethal weapons by the Israeli police in East Jerusalem since the summer of 2014.

Throughout the summer of 2014, violent clashes took place on an almost daily basis between the police and large groups of Palestinians across East Jerusalem. The protestors were mainly youngsters and even children, who threw stones and Molotov cocktails, blocked roads and set fire to trash-cans and other objects. The riots first erupted after the kidnapping and murder of a 16-year-old Palestinian boy from East Jerusalem by Jewish extremists, and was further exacerbated during the deadly war between Israel and Gaza (8 July to 26 August). The clashes continued on a smaller scale throughout September, October and November, and the situation in East Jerusalem in general remains volatile.

The response of the police to this dangerous and complicated situation was characterized by excessive use of force, massive violations of police regulations, and measures involving collective punishment. Alongside the more routine use of tear gas and stun grenades, the police introduced this summer two new non-lethal weapons - a new kind of sponge bullet and the skunk liquid. They were both extensively and disproportionately used, causing both physical harm as well as damage to property.



Sponge Bullets

In July 2014, the Police began widespread use of a new kind of sponge bullet (bullet no. 4557) to disperse riots and demonstrations in East Jerusalem. Compared to the blue sponge bullets (bullet no. 632), which had been used for many years, the new black bullets are twice as heavy and hard. The damage they inflict, as proven by the comparative extent of injuries, is much more severe than that caused by the blue bullets.

The sponge bullet procedure ("Professional Directive – Operation of 40 mm Foam Rifle", Israel Police Regulations) determines that both the blue and black sponge bullets are only intended “**to cause blunt injury and temporarily neutralize rioters during public disturbances**” and are employed “in order to **deter and arrest individual rioters during disturbances**”.

However, in practice, the black sponge bullets have caused extremely severe injuries to residents of East Jerusalem, including **fractures of various body parts and loss of eyesight**. In the tragic case of Muhammed Sanuqrut, age 16, a black sponge bullet, which struck his head on 7 September 2014, is believed to have caused his death, according to the autopsy performed by a Palestinian pathologist. (The Israeli pathologist who participated in the autopsy has not yet released his conclusions, despite a significant amount of time having passed since the autopsy was completed.)

Between July 2014 to May 2015, ACRI has gathered testimonies from 10 residents of East Jerusalem, including 6 children, who were hit in their face and lost an eye, and 5 others who suffered other serious injuries. **The youngest victim is a 6 years old child from the village Issawiya in East Jerusalem, who was hit in his face by a sponge bullet while stepping down from the school bus near his house on 24.12.14.** He lost his eye and suffered from severe cuts and fractures in his face. Two children, 13-year-old Zakaria Julani and 10-year-old Yehia al-Amudi, were both hit in their face by a sponge bullet near the Shuafat Refugee Camp checkpoint



on 31.3.15 and 21.5.15 respectively, and lost an eye. Al-Amudi's facial bones were seriously fractured.

Through analyzing data collected by UN OCHA in the oPt on Palestinians injured in East Jerusalem by Israeli forces, ACRI has learned that between June and December 2014, 1,003 Palestinians in East Jerusalem required medical treatment for injuries caused by sponge bullets. (OCHA refers in its statistics to “rubber bullets” without differentiating between rubber-coated bullets and sponge bullets. The OCHA classification is used in Palestinian news sources and social media, which report injuries allegedly caused by rubber bullets in East Jerusalem. Yet Israeli law prohibits the use of rubber-coated bullets inside Israel, and that prohibition is in place in East and West Jerusalem. Since our inquiries have found no evidence to support any use of rubber-coated bullets in East Jerusalem, we concluded that the OCHA report as well as other media reports actually refer to the use of sponge bullets.)

Of the 1,003 cases cited by OCHA, 144 injured were evacuated to hospital. At least 47 of those injured had been shot in the upper part of their body, in contravention of the regulations governing the use of these bullets by Israeli Police.

The regulations for the use of these bullets state that they are not to be used against minors and that they should not be aimed towards the upper part of the body. Nevertheless, the testimonies we have gathered clearly prove that the Police has massively and routinely violated its regulations causing unreasonable and disproportionate physical damage.

We do not disregard the need of the Police for effective measures to handle severe riots, while avoiding the use of live fire. It is clear that since July 2014 the Police have had to deal with particularly severe public disturbances in East Jerusalem. However, these severe injuries, which were all sustained since the black sponge bullets entered into use, are an **unacceptable outcome raising doubts as to the proportionality of use of this weapon to handle disturbances, as well as its categorization as a non-lethal weapon.**



On March 8, 2015 ACRI sent an urgent letter addressed the Police Chief Commissioner and the Attorney General regarding the use of black sponge bullets. In light of the multiple incidents of severe injuries and the tragic death of Muhammed Sanuqrut, ACRI demanded that the police immediately cease the use of black sponge bullets and conduct an extensive investigation into their safety, the conditions which allow for their use, their suitability for use to disperse riots, and the soundness of the procedure as well as the extent to which the procedure has been violated in practice. ([Letter attached.](#))

Skunk Spray

Skunk Spray (colloquially referred to as "the skunk") is an Israeli invention intended to effectively disperse crowds. It consists of a water canon that sprays an extremely foul smelling chemical liquid from a special vehicle. The liquid is made of water, yeast and baking soda, and the foul smell it produces stays for days on any surface that it touches, such as asphalt, walls, cloths etc. Between July and December 2014, streets in almost every neighborhood of East Jerusalem had been covered in tremendous amounts of skunk liquid. Most of the liquid was aimed towards residential properties, cars and shops, causing serious and long-term damage to property. As a result, the daily lives of tens of thousands of East Jerusalem residents were affected, compelling them to live with this foul stench for days at a time. The physical side effects of the skunk may include nausea, skin rash and vomiting. Residents also reported feeling humiliation, as such stench covered their houses and streets.

The Police procedure regulating the use of skunk liquid ("Procedure number 90.221.111.008 Operation and Use of 'Skunk' Liquid", Israel Police) sets forth a number of rules to ensure that the use of this substance, which was "intended for the dispersal of public disturbance" (section 1F) does not harm the general population more than is necessary to achieve the set objectives. Thus, for example, the procedure states that it should be used only in open areas, that it is forbidden to use



the skunk liquid in cases where elderly people, children or pregnant women may be harmed, and that the liquid must not be sprayed towards elevated locations due to the risk of people falling from heights.

Nevertheless, the experiences during the second half of 2014 demonstrate clearly that the use of skunk liquid in the crowded neighborhoods of East Jerusalem did not adhere to police procedure and caused disproportionate harm to the populations of these neighborhoods, particularly to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, infants and persons with disabilities.

Additionally, the police made arbitrary and excessive use of skunk liquid during this period in a number of separate incidents in different neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. In these cases the skunk was directed towards houses, shops, cars etc, without any apparent reason, i.e., to places where there was no crowd to disperse. A description of the events **raises the concern of intentional, illegal use of skunk liquid on uninvolved individuals.**

For example, on 7 October 2014 at around 17:00 skunk liquid was sprayed from side to side all along Shmuel Ben Adaya Street in a-Tur (the main street of the Sawana neighborhood). From the testimony of the reservations manager at a local hotel, it is clear that the foul-smelling liquid was sprayed toward the hotel entrance and garden and its odor penetrated the hotel lobby and guest rooms on the first few floors. As a result, a hotel receptionist, in advanced stages of pregnancy, felt sick and was compelled to leave the site urgently. In addition, hotel guests, some of them elderly, fled the site and some complained of headaches and nausea as a result of the foul odor, which spread throughout the hotel and its rooms.

Furthermore, on the 15th and 17th of October 2014, the skunk liquid hit many residential apartments and shops on the main street of the neighborhood of Issawiya. According to residents, the skunk vehicle continued to spray the foul liquid long after the rioters had fled the site, and the skunk liquid was aimed directly at homes and shops along the street. For example, the skunk liquid was sprayed towards Mr. Aziz



Abid's hardware store (on the main street at the entrance to the neighborhood) and at his hardware warehouse on the other side of the street.

On 24 November 2014 ACRI contacted the Chief Commissioner of the Police demanding the end of the use of skunk in East Jerusalem, given that skunk liquid is not suitable for use in crowded residential areas, and since it was often not the appropriate tool to use given the type of incidents taking place in East Jerusalem. ACRI also demanded that the police investigate the claims regarding illegal use of skunk liquid as in several cases described in the letter.

The legal advisor for the Police replied that they would not agree to prohibit the use of skunk in residential areas, as ACRI had suggested, but that they had agreed to revise the regulations in order to make sure that uninvolved persons would not be harmed. In addition, the police decided that the use of skunk would be only permitted upon the approval of the Jerusalem Police Chief, and not a lower-ranking officer, as had been the case beforehand. ([Letter attached.](#))

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