

COMMENT

The plight of Gaza's women and children

INHUMANE: Israel's clear violation of humanitarian law calls for a review of the effectiveness of international treaties

TWO major world events are commemorated in August every year, and this year seems to be very significant in this respect. The 150th anniversary of the first Geneva Convention was commemorated on Aug 22, while Aug 12 marked the 15th anniversary of International Youth Day.

Recent years, and indeed, the past few weeks, have witnessed consistent violation of the principles of international humanitarian laws as represented by the Geneva Conventions.

The Gaza crisis is one of many of such violations which should be considered a major subject matter in the thematic discussions and information campaigns on the two commemorative events across the world.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other notable humanitarian bodies and non-governmental organisations have continuously reached out to victims who are in need of help in crises. This has been witnessed in Gaza, where women and children

seem to be the most vulnerable people in the ongoing carnage.

The atrocities being committed by Israel against the helpless women and children in Gaza are nothing but a calculated attempt to annihilate different levels of productive generations within the Palestinian Authority.

The Geneva Convention IV of 1949 and the Additional Protocol II of 1977 specifically relate to the ongoing Gaza humanitarian crisis. It is on record that 80 per cent of the 1.5 million people in Gaza have been depending on humanitarian aid, and as the situation worsens by the day, more than 90 per cent of the total population will now be depending on such aid from across the globe.

In the ongoing genocide in Gaza, women have been killed and children have been brutally murdered, besides the genocidal annihilation of civilian men with impunity. Social media has been rendered an open clipboard for the ugly pictures of the systematic killing of Palestinians. The gruesome images send shivers down the spine of any who has a human heart.

Gaza has been the largest open detention camp in the history of mankind. Gaza city has been described as the largest "concentration camp" or "open-air prison", which is unprecedented in the

recorded history of man. Since 2007, the city has been faced with ill-advised land, air and sea blockades by Israel and Egypt.

On Aug 22, 1864, 12 states signed the treaty which clearly outlined the sacrosanct obligation to spare and protect wounded soldiers, and the people as well as equipment that are involved in their care during armed conflicts.

Israel's violation of international humanitarian law through the shelling of hospitals and medical care centres across Gaza with utmost impunity calls for a rethink on the effectiveness of the principles of international humanitarian law.

The United Nations buildings sheltering displaced Gazans, particularly women and children who are left with nothing

but this only safe haven in the occupied city, are not spared in the genocide and have also been under attack.

Are these atrocities not regarded as war crimes? Are they not considered a violation of the principles of international humanitarian law? But who will take up the challenge to question the atrocities?

Though the foreign minister of the Palestinian Authority has indicated its preparedness to invite prosecutors at the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague to investigate the war crimes com-



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A Palestinian woman and her children walking through rubble following Israeli strikes in Rafah recently. **Women and children were the most vulnerable people in the recent carnage.** AP pic

mitted by Israel, the whole episode leaves much to be desired.

Israel has not ratified the Rome Statute that set up the ICC, and is one of the states (the United States and Sudan are others) that have officially declared that they no longer want to be state parties. Hence, they do not have any legal obligation arising from the statute.

The implication of the position of Israel with regards to the ICC is that it might be legally impossible to bring up a case against it at The Hague. Recent evidence reveals that Israel is also working with its allies and doing everything possible to prevent the ICC from pushing forward possible war crime charges against it.

There should be a way of bringing non-state parties to the Rome Statute to justice when they commit genocide. This lacuna in international law requires the concerted efforts of major stakeholders so that a preventive mechanism will be put in place rather than the usual ineffective remedial measures to bring war criminals to justice.

This is the time for the world to act. Different levels of productive generations are gradually being annihilated. The blockade of the Gaza strip should be lifted and access to

food and medical supplies should be provided as soon as possible to save the frail children and women of Gaza who have been subjected to premeditated murder, psychological trauma, physical abuse and torture over the years.

We need a more peaceful world that will not only provide a safe environment for us to achieve our individual and collective aspirations but also serve as a safe place for our future generations. This is a clarion call to all major political gladiators in various armed conflicts across the world, particularly those who are perceived to be having some hidden hands in the genocide in Gaza. Major parties should return to the negotiating table and respect the principles of international humanitarian law.

As Malaysia commemorates its 57th Independence Day, Malaysians should remember the plight of women and children across the world, particularly in Gaza. Global peace can only be nurtured and sustained through local initiatives.

As such, Malaysians should strengthen the bond of nationhood and ensure moderation in their mutual dealings. Mutual acceptance and peaceful coexistence should be the hallmarks of our existential relationship.