



«Tear gas» cannisters and rubber bullets

consequences, in addition to the problems already mentioned. The use of high-velocity bullets is a case in point. These bullets essentially explode inside the body, scattering fragments which extensively damage bones, internal organs, nerves, muscle tissue, blood vessels and the spinal cord. The PHR delegation reported that 30 percent of the gunshot injuries over one day old that they saw in hospitals «had resulted in serious long-term or permanent loss of leg function...most of them will never walk again.»

Although tens of Palestinians have died from beatings, the beating policy of the army is systematically designed to inflict maximum damage while reducing the risk of death. A physically or mentally crippled Palestinian is much less likely to receive image-damaging international media attention than a martyr, yet the negative impact on the community is as great, if not greater. Reports from the occupied territories tell of soldiers first ascertaining if their victim is left or right-handed and then proceeding, at the least, to break that limb in a way so systematic as to indicate «training» in the most effective bone-breaking technique. Indeed, the PHR report noted that virtually all the hand and arm fractures they saw were on the dominant side. The beatings meted out in Gaza are particularly brutal, with the resulting injuries being generally more serious and extensive than in the West Bank. Remarking on their observations in Gaza, PHR wrote that «the word *beating* does not properly convey the literal pounding and mauling with clubs and other weapons required to produce the injuries we saw.» That Gaza, whose largely refugee population is concentrated in camps particularly vulnerable to army violence, can be and is frequently closed-off to the media by the authorities is, at least in part, the probable explanation for this.

Whatever the cause of the injuries, the long-term effects are the same on a community whose medical resources are totally inadequate to deal with injuries needing such extensive physical and psychological rehabilitation.

Rubber bullets - actually metal slugs encased in hard rubber - have been largely responsible for the extensive eye injuries and actual loss of eyes suffered by many Palestinians. The deliberate misuse by soldiers of this supposedly non-lethal means of «crowd control» has resulted in the death of at least six Palestinians, four of whom were children aged ten or younger. They died after suffering severe head injuries caused by rubber bullets fired at close range.

Tear gas, another deliberately misused means of «riot control,» has caused at least 88 deaths during the uprising, according to the Palestine Human Rights Information Center report of June. Indeed, «tear gas» is a misnomer for

the toxic gases being used against the Palestinian population with such devastating consequences. Physicians for Human Rights, which studied the massive use of tear gas against demonstrators by the South Korean government in 1987, stated that tear gases should more properly be called «poisonous gases» and should be «banned from further use against human populations everywhere» (reported in MERIP, May-June 1988). CS gas, which is used extensively by the Israeli forces, is more potent and has longer-lasting effects than the other gas - called CN - known to be used in the occupied territories. These gases are potentially lethal in high concentrations and when used in enclosed places. Infants, children, the elderly and those with respiratory and heart disease are particularly vulnerable to the effects of these gases.

Occupation forces routinely throw tear gas into homes, schools, shops, clinics, hospitals and mosques. It sticks to clothing, walls, furniture and carpeting and will remain there for days, contaminating food supplies that can unknowingly be ingested. Apart from the immediate injury these gases cause, the long-term effects of them are not known, including whether or not they are carcinogenic.

In addition to these 88 deaths, hundreds of women have miscarried their babies after being exposed to tear gas. The problem is particularly acute in the crowded refugee camps of the Gaza Strip, where the Popular Committees for Health Services report 630 women having miscarried after exposure to tear gas in the first 14 months alone of the uprising.

Although it is not known exactly how tear gas causes death, medical experts suggest that the resulting oxygen deprivation and the gas's effect on blood circulation are the reasons. The breakdown of the gas's chemicals in the bloodstream into a toxic substance like cyanide is also suspected in causing tear gas-related deaths. In addition, serious injuries have been caused by soldiers firing the metal gas canisters from rifles directly at people from close range, including into their faces. The Israelis have not attributed a single death to tear gas, although the few post-mortems performed by the authorities on tear gas victims list the cause of death as, to give a few examples, heart attack, pneumonia or respiratory failure, without taking into consideration the circumstances of death (Ben Alofs, *More Than Tear Gas: Harassing Agents and Their Use in the Occupied Territories*, 1988, p. 43). It is interesting that the military authorities have forbidden Gaza medical staff to list tear gas inhalation as the cause of death on a child's death certificate.

As well, the Israeli authorities refuse to disclose information about the composition and toxicity of the tear gas being used, although this would be quite helpful in providing proper medical treatment. Even physicians inquiring about this at the Poison Control Center in Haifa were told that such information was unavailable or «classified.»

There is evidence that Israel is using other more toxic chemicals against the Palestinian population. Ben Alofs reported that a doctor at Moqassed Hospital in Jerusalem described the effects of a different gas as causing problems to the nervous system. Also, UNRWA's director of health, John Hiddlestone, reported that Israeli troops were using highly toxic new gases against Palestinians; one kind causes severe abdominal pain and another immobilized its victims by weakening the muscles upon inhalation. He also described an incident in which two Palestinians were beaten and put in a room where Israeli soldiers had sprayed an aerosol. «The room was then shut and after an hour or so