Israel attack on Gaza IVF clinic a ‘genocidal act’: UN probe

AFP- A United Nations investigation concluded Thursday that Israel carried out “genocidal acts” in Gaza through the destruction of its main IVF clinic, maternity facilities and other reproductive healthcare facilities.
The UN Commission of Inquiry said Israel had “intentionally attacked and destroyed” the Palestinian territory’s main fertility centre, and had simultaneously imposed a siege and blocked aid including medication for ensuring safe pregnancies, deliveries and neonatal care.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reacted by calling the findings “false and absurd”.
In a statement, the UN commission said it found that Israeli authorities “have destroyed in part the reproductive capacity of Palestinians in Gaza as a group through the systematic destruction of sexual and reproductive healthcare”.

It said this amounted to “two categories of genocidal acts” during Israel’s offensive in Gaza, launched after the attacks by Hamas militants on Israel on October 7, 2023.
The United Nations’ genocide convention defines that crime as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.
Of its five categories, the inquiry said the two implicating Israel were “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction” and “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group”.

– ‘Chronic lying’ –

The three-person Independent International Commission of

Inquiry was established by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2021 to investigate alleged international law violations in Israel and the Palestinian territories.
Commission member Chris Sidoti explained that the crime of genocide concerned action and intention – both general and then specific – and the report had so far only looked at action.
“We have not made any finding of genocide. We have identified a number of acts that constitute the categories of genocidal act under the law. We have not yet examined the question of genocidal purpose,” he told a press conference.
“We’ll be soon in a position to deal comprehensively with the question of genocide,” he added, potentially later this year.
Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem told AFP the report “confirms what has happened on the ground: genocide and violations of all humanitarian and legal standards”.
He said it underscored “the urgent need to expedite the prosecution of its (Israel’s) leaders for these crimes and ensure their swift trial at the International Criminal Court”.
Netanyahu branded the Human Rights Council an “anti-Israeli circus”.
He said the UN “once again chooses to attack the state of Israel with false accusations, including absurd claims”.
Israel’s mission in Geneva accused the commission of advancing a “predetermined and biased political agenda… in a shameless attempt to incriminate the Israel Defence Forces”.

In response, Sidoti said Israel “continues to obstruct” the inquiry’s investigations and prevent access to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

“They clearly do not read our documents. They clearly have an agenda that they pursue, totally devoid of any relationship to fact. It’s chronic lying,” he said.

– Destruction of IVF clinic –

The report said maternity hospitals and wards had been

systematically destroyed in Gaza, along with the Al-Basma IVF Centre, the territory's main in-vitro fertility clinic.

It said Al-Basma was shelled in December 2023, reportedly destroying around 4,000 embryos at a clinic that served 2,000 to 3,000 patients a month.

The commission found that the Israeli Security Forces intentionally attacked and destroyed the clinic, including all the reproductive material stored for the future conception of Palestinians.

It concluded that the destruction "was a measure intended to prevent births among Palestinians in Gaza, which is a genocidal act".

– 'Extermination' –

Furthermore, the report said the wider harm to pregnant, lactating and new mothers in Gaza was on an "unprecedented scale", with an irreversible impact on the reproductive and fertility prospects of Gazans.

Such underlying acts "amount to crimes against humanity" and deliberately trying to destroy the Palestinians as a group – "one of the categories of genocidal acts", the commission concluded.

The report concluded that Israel had targeted civilian women and girls directly, "acts that constitute the crime against humanity of murder and the war crime of wilful killing".

Women and girls died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth due to the conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities impacting access to reproductive health care, "acts that amount to the crime against humanity of extermination", it added.

Sidoti said the next steps "certainly involve the courts", and countries could take action themselves under international

law.

“If they waited for action by the Security Council they’d be waiting until hell froze over,” he said.

AFP