

# **Joint Statement on Violence in the Middle East: Cease Attacks on Civilians and Protect Human Rights**

We, the undersigned, condemn the rapidly escalating violence and widening regional war across the Middle East.

We strongly urge for an immediate end to attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. All parties to the conflict, including state and non-state actors, must strictly comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Hospitals, schools, water systems, humanitarian facilities, and residential areas must never be targeted.

Historical hostilities between Israel, USA and Iran have now expanded into a broader regional conflict affecting multiple countries and placing millions of civilians at risk.

On 28 February 2026, coordinated military strikes by the United States of America and Israel targeted Iranian military, political, and strategic infrastructure, marking the start of the current war. The strikes included attacks on leadership targets in Tehran and other cities and assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. It dramatically escalated tensions and triggered a wave of retaliation across the region.

The Shajareh Tayyebah girls' elementary school in Minab, Iran, was struck by a missile on 28 February 2026 during school hours. The attack killed at least 165 people, most of them schoolgirls aged between 7 and 12. It destroyed a large part of the school building and has been widely condemned internationally. Ongoing investigations and satellite evidence suggest the missile may have been a U.S.-launched Tomahawk, possibly targeting a nearby military facility.

Since then, Iran has launched missile and drone attacks targeting Israel, U.S. military installations, and several neighboring countries hosting U.S. forces, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Air defense systems across the Gulf have intercepted numerous missiles and drones, while several attacks have damaged civilian infrastructure and energy facilities. Various attacks were also reported in Iraq, Jordan and Oman.

As we publish this statement, the conflict continues to intensify. Iran has launched new missile and drone attacks targeting Israel and Gulf states, while the United States and

Israel continue airstrikes on Iranian sites. Missile alerts have sounded across cities in the Gulf region. Attacks have targeted energy infrastructure and shipping routes near the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical energy corridors.

The war has also expanded through regional actors. Armed groups allied with Iran, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, have launched attacks on Israel. Israel initiated large-scale military campaigns in Lebanon, worsening an already fragile humanitarian situation in Lebanon. Hundreds have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced across the country and neighboring areas.

The consequences of this widening war are devastating. Civilian populations across the region are experiencing casualties, displacement, and the destruction of homes, infrastructure, and essential services. Hospitals, schools, energy facilities, desalination plants, and transportation systems have been damaged or disrupted in several countries.

The World Health Organization warned that the "black rain" and toxic compounds in the air in Iran after strikes on oil facilities could cause respiratory illnesses. It backed Iran's advisory urging people to remain indoors. Oil shipments through the region have also been threatened, heightening global economic instability and humanitarian risks.

The rapidly deteriorating situation has also significantly restricted civic space across the region. Human rights defenders, journalists, humanitarian workers, and civil society organizations face growing risks as they attempt to document violations, provide aid, and advocate for peace and accountability. Restrictions on potentially lifesaving information, intimidation of activists, and attacks on journalists threaten transparency and undermine the protection of fundamental freedoms at a time when they are most needed.

Several Gulf countries — including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain — have reportedly targeted citizens who document or share information about wars or military operations. Governments have used broad cybercrime and national security laws that criminalise the spread of "false information," harm to national unity, or support for terrorism. These provisions are used against journalists, activists, and ordinary social media users who share information or views about conflicts.

In Bahrain, for example, individuals have been arrested for filming and sharing videos of attacks. Public prosecutors have reportedly sought severe charges, including treason and the death penalty. Such measures restrict freedom of expression, while governments maintain that they are necessary to protect national security and combat misinformation during times of conflict.

In Lebanon, citing concerns of the ongoing war, the Parliament decided to postpone the May 2026 Parliamentary elections. Its 9 March decision extended the Parliament's own mandate by two years, which is equivalent to half of a regular term. The decision has been widely condemned for exceeding constitutional provisions and undermining accountability and electoral rights.

Serious concerns also remain over the safety of Iran's December 2025-January 2026 protest detainees, forcibly disappeared protesters, and other imprisoned activists and journalists who are now held inside Iranian detention centers within active conflict zones.

The situation in Palestine, particularly in Gaza, remains catastrophic, with civilians facing mass displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and severe restrictions on access to essential services and humanitarian aid. The continued blockade and ongoing hostilities raise serious concerns under international humanitarian law.

Our call to action:

- For all parties to immediately de-escalate hostilities and pursue an urgent ceasefire and prioritise diplomatic engagement and dialogue over further military escalation.
- Urge the international community — including the United Nations, regional organisations, and influential states — to:
  - Intensify efforts to prevent further escalation.
  - Facilitate humanitarian access to affected populations.
  - Support meaningful negotiations aimed at achieving a just and sustainable peace.
- Urge concerned governments to protect civil society actors during the crisis, while upholding the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.
- Ensure that independent monitoring and documentation of human rights violations can occur without interference.

At this critical moment, the protection of life and dignity must remain paramount. We stand in solidarity with affected communities across the Middle East and reiterate their call for an immediate end to violence, accountability for violations of international law, and renewed international commitment to peace, human rights, and justice in the region.

We, as a global collective, affirm that democracy is the path to dignity, freedom, and equality for all. It is not confined to sets of institutions or procedures, but rooted in values, cultures, traditions, and the lived experience of a society. Democracy can only endure when it is cultivated and sustained by the people themselves. Attempts at regime change in the region have been disastrous, the repercussions of which continue to be felt.

**Signatories:**

1. CIVICUS