

March 29, 2026

## [Iran: Unlawful Cluster Munition Strikes on Israel](#)

### Indiscriminate Weapon Kills at Least 4 Civilians



Missiles launched from Iran carrying suspected cluster munitions streak across the sky over central Israel, March 5, 2026. © 2026 Ohad Zwigenberg/AP Photo

(Beirut, March 30, 2026) – The [Iranian](#) government has repeatedly used inherently indiscriminate [cluster munitions](#) delivered by ballistic missiles in attacks on [Israel](#) since February 28, 2026, Human Rights Watch said today. At least four civilians have been killed in the strikes, which violate the laws of war and may amount to war crimes.

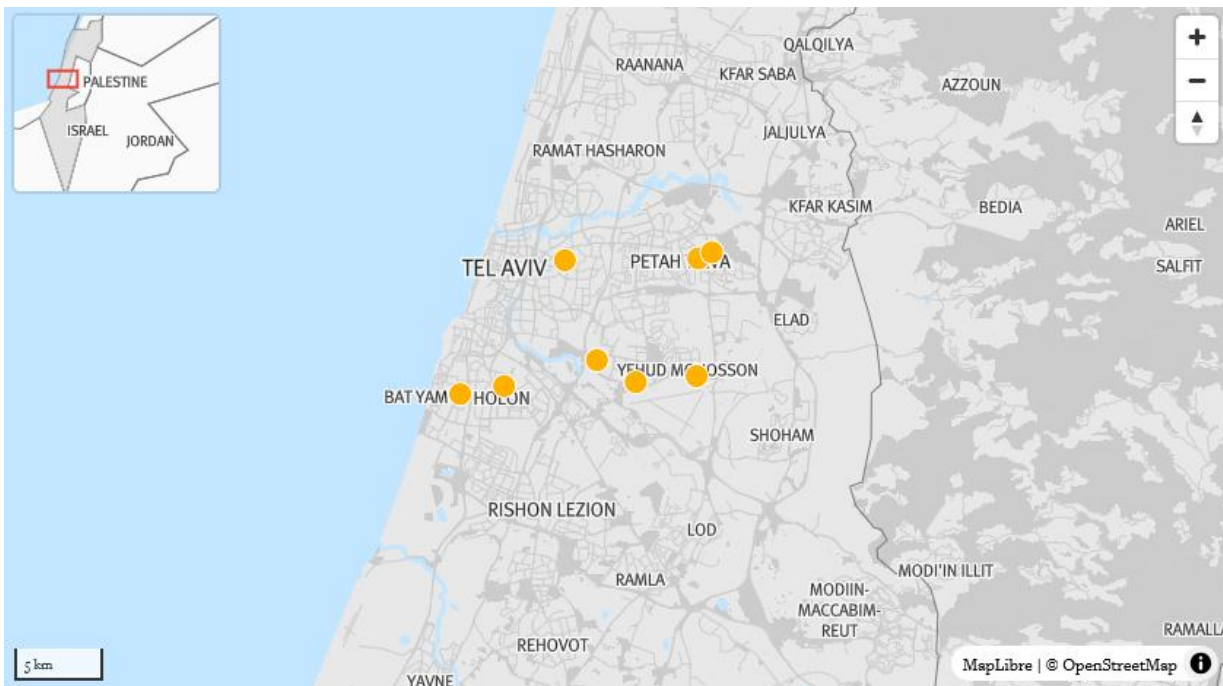
Human Rights Watch confirmed three separate Iranian attacks involving cluster munitions that affected population centers in Israel, including two separate incidents that resulted in civilian deaths near Tel Aviv, two men in Yehud on March 9 and an older man and woman in Ramat Gan on March 18.

“Iran’s use of cluster munitions in populated areas in Israel pose a foreseeable and long-lasting danger to civilians,” said [Patrick Thompson](#), crisis, conflict and arms researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Cluster munition bomblets are dispersed over a wide area, making them unlawfully indiscriminate in violation of the laws of war.”

[Cluster munitions](#) are fired in rockets, missiles, and projectiles or dropped from aircraft. They typically [disperse](#) in the air, spreading dozens of explosive submunitions, or bomblets, indiscriminately over a large area. [Many fail to explode](#) on initial impact, leaving duds that can kill and maim, like landmines, for years or even decades, unless cleared and destroyed.

Human Rights Watch analyzed 50 videos and 5 photographs posted online of suspected cluster munition use by Iran between March 1 and 20, as well as 6 photographs of unexploded submunitions apparently located in Israel and the West Bank. Human Rights Watch also interviewed witnesses to suspected cluster munition attacks. Human Rights Watch wrote to the Iranian government on March 25 concerning the use of cluster munitions. No response had been received at the time of publication.

### Confirmed Submunition Impacts



For privacy and security reasons, Human Rights Watch has anonymized the locations by rounding the coordinates and restricting the zoom level for readers. Graphics © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

Since the United States and Israel [launched](#) their assault on Iran on February 28, Iranian forces have responded with drone and missile attacks against Israel, as well as other countries in the region, particularly in the Gulf. [Media reports](#) and the Israeli government said at least 16 civilians have been killed in Israel and 4 in the West Bank as a result of missile fire. Nine of the victims in Israel were killed in a single [ballistic missile strike](#) on the town of Beit Shemesh on March 1, including 3 children. As of March 27, the Iranian Red Crescent had [reported](#) 1,900 deaths in Iran since the start of the conflict.

Although Iran has not joined the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which comprehensively bans all production and use of these weapons, international humanitarian law prohibits indiscriminate attacks. The widespread impact of submunitions across a populated area is

indicative of attacks that cannot discriminate between civilians and combatants and may amount to war crimes. Unexploded submunitions pose continued danger to civilians long after attacks.

Iran is [known to possess](#) ballistic missiles capable of delivering submunitions. The Israeli military spokesperson [accused](#) Iran of using cluster munitions in a post on X on February 28, the first reported use of these weapons during the current hostilities. Human Rights Watch was unable to verify this claim, but on March 1, multiple sources began posting videos and photographs on social media of what appear to be cluster munitions dispersed by an Iranian ballistic missile. It is unclear if these images are from the same or separate attacks.

Human Rights Watch reviewed 30 similar videos showing descending ballistic missiles surrounded by numerous suspected submunitions falling toward the ground. These most likely show eight separate incidents between March 1 and 20. Most show ballistic missiles with between 21 and 25 objects falling along their paths. Two of the videos show at least 65 objects. Human Rights Watch could not corroborate where these videos were taken, but researchers could not find them posted online before March. There is no visible evidence in videos reviewed that suggest these missiles were intercepted. The Israeli military has [reportedly said](#) that it does not attempt to intercept cluster munitions to conserve interceptors.



Two images of unexploded submunitions posted by South Sharon Regional Council in central Israel on March 5, 2026. © 2026 Human Rights Watch

The first incident involving cluster munitions that Human Rights Watch confirmed occurred in the city of Or Yehuda, in central Israel. On March 6, Emanuel Fabian, a military correspondent for the Times of Israel, [posted CCTV footage](#) on X showing a clearly identifiable submunition affecting a civilian area that Human Rights Watch geolocated to a commercial area in Or Yehuda. The video, timestamped March 4 at 2:38 p.m., shows a submunition hitting the middle of a wide, empty street, causing an explosion.

The second attack took place on March 9, killing the two men and injuring at least one other person. Human Rights Watch verified near simultaneous impacts in Or Yehuda, Yehud, Bat Yam and Holon, all nearby cities in the broader metropolitan area of Tel Aviv. This area is Israel's most densely populated, accounting for up to 45 percent of its population. The apparent

submunitions were likely from one ballistic missile, affecting sites up to 13 kilometers apart, demonstrating the inherently indiscriminate nature of these weapons.

The attack in Yehud killed two construction workers at a building site. A video posted to Telegram on March 9 just before midday and verified by Human Rights Watch, shows two bodies several meters apart, one in a pool of blood, at a construction site. A witness to the attack said: “I work here on the construction site where the men were killed. I was pulling [my car] onto the street, on my way to work, and the sirens came on, and I heard the explosion.”

An apparent submunition impact approximately five kilometers away, in Or Yehuda, severely injured a man at the same time. Human Rights Watch verified CCTV footage posted to Telegram and geolocated it to Or Yehuda that shows a suspected submunition detonating on a road between newly constructed apartment complexes and a pedestrian falling injured to the ground a few meters away.

At 11:30 a.m. on March 9, Magen David Adom, Israel’s national emergency medical service, [posted on](#) Telegram that it was responding to multiple incidents in central Israel that had caused serious casualties. Fabian, the reporter for The Times of Israel, [reported](#) that the impacts were caused by submunitions, quoting first responders.

Human Rights Watch analysis of the detonations and the damage to residential areas in Yehud, Or Yehuda, Bat Yam, and Holon also suggests the use of submunitions, which have a relatively small explosive payload and cause significantly less damage than medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, which have high explosive payloads many times larger than a single submunition. The damage was also inconsistent with kinetic damage caused by falling debris.

In the third incident Human Rights Watch verified, suspected submunitions struck multiple locations between midnight and 1 a.m. on March 18. At 12:12 a.m., the Israeli military [announced](#) the detection of ballistic missile launches from Iran and at around 12:20 a.m., [sirens](#) began sounding throughout central Israel. From 12:22 a.m., [multiple sources began](#) posting videos on Telegram of suspected cluster munitions, with the captions saying they were falling over central Israel. Researchers could not determine the locations of these videos, as they were taken at night, but it appears that they were not posted online before March 18.

These videos were followed by reports on social media of impacts in Bnei Brak, Petah Tikva, and Ramat Gan, all within the Tel Aviv metropolitan area.

Shortly after reports of strikes surfaced, Magen David Adom [reported](#) that a man and a woman had died of severe fragmentation injuries in Ramat Gan. Videos and photographs of the impact site verified by Human Rights Watch show damage to a three-story residential building. A top-floor apartment where the couple were killed sustained damage to at least one interior room and its façade, with only light structural damage to the rest of the building, including a collapsed awning. The apartment damage is consistent with a submunition, as a large unitary warhead from a ballistic missile would most likely have caused significantly more damage.

A witness in Ramat Gan said: “We were huddled inside our shelter—me, my mother, father, and brother—when suddenly, after the alarm, we heard an explosion. It sounded close. We opened

the window, looked outside, and saw that the apartment across the street from us was hit. A [munition] went through the roof and hit two older people, in their 70s, before they had reached the shelter.”

Human Rights Watch confirmed near simultaneous impacts in Petah Tikva on March 18 that were also most likely caused by submunitions. A photograph geolocated by Human Rights Watch shows an impact crater next to an upturned vehicle consistent with the size and depth of craters in other videos of submunition impacts. A video verified by Human Rights Watch and time-stamped 12:21 a.m. on March 18, shows an explosion consistent with a submunition impact approximately 815 meters to the northeast.

On March 19, [four Palestinian women](#) were killed in the West Bank town of Beit Awa. The Israeli military [asserted](#) they were killed by a submunition, while the Palestinian Red Crescent Society reported that they were killed by shrapnel falling from a missile. Human Rights Watch has not been able to independently verify the type of munition that killed them. Palestinians in the West Bank are [more vulnerable](#) to missiles and falling interception fragments due to a lack of protective infrastructure such as warning sirens and bomb shelters.

Human Rights Watch also reviewed six photographs showing unexploded submunitions posted online between March 1 and 15, that reportedly struck Israel and the West Bank. Human Rights Watch could not establish the locations of these submunitions due to the lack of geographic detail in the photographs, but researchers could not find them online before March. These submunitions are consistent with [munitions used by Iran](#) during the 12-Day War in June 2025, and their use has not been documented in other conflicts.

Publicly available technical information on the exact weapons used in these strikes is limited. Iran has, however, previously published information on ballistic missiles that have the capability to dispense submunitions. Iranian media published information on the “Zelzal” ballistic missile, which can carry up to 30 unguided submunitions weighing 17 kilograms that resemble those identified by Human Rights Watch. The number of submunitions is also consistent with most videos of suspected submunition use reviewed by Human Rights Watch.

Following an apparent failed missile test in Iran in 2023, submunitions resembling those Human Rights Watch identified in Israel [struck](#) the city of Gorgan in northeastern Iran. These submunitions are equipped with a heat shield that protects them as they descend through the atmosphere, causing a glow visible in videos of their descent. Additionally, Iran is also [known](#) to possess multiple other ballistic missiles reportedly capable of delivering submunitions, including variants of the “Ghadr,” “Khorramshar,” and “Fateh” missiles.

“The Iranian government should immediately stop firing cluster munitions,” Thompson said. “These munitions are not only inherently indiscriminate at the time of use, but unexploded submunitions pose a risk long afterwards, until cleared or destroyed.”

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