

END ISRAEL'S ASSAULT ON GAZA

Press Kit



Palestinehouse
educational and cultural centre



Contents.

Press Release

Frequently Asked Questions

Canada's Position

United Nations Condemns Israeli Assault

Suggested Contacts

Further Reading

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canadian civil society condemns massacre of 400 people in Gaza: Calls for immediate action to end the assault

January 2nd, 2009 (Toronto): Opposition is growing across the country as Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip enters its seventh day. Canadian Jewish, Arab and a broad range of civil society organizations have drawn together in protest of Israel's on-going massacre of the Palestinian population in the area.

Press Conference: Friday, January 2nd, 2009

10am at the Sheraton Hotel: 123 Queen St W

Featuring: Judy Rebick (CAW Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy, Ryerson University), Rafeef Ziadah (Palestine House), Alaa Khalaf (Palestinian Canadian from Gaza), Mohamed Boudjenane (CAF Executive Director)

Demonstration: Saturday, January 3rd, 2009

2pm at Dundas Sq. (Yonge and Dundas)

Over 400 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military in the last week, making this the single worst massacre in Gaza since it was illegally occupied in 1967. As many as 2000 others have been injured and the threat of further killings hangs heavily as Israel is refusing a 48 hour humanitarian ceasefire and is mobilizing for what now appears to be an inevitable ground invasion.

"This assault is a collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza, it is clearly targeting and murdering civilians - it is a blatant war crime by an Occupying force" says Rafeef Ziadah of Palestine House.

Gaza has been under an illegal and internationally condemned siege since April 2006. With little reprieve, this siege has restricted all flow of aid, medical supplies, fuel and other necessities of life into the territory. This latest military assault has created a humanitarian catastrophe. "The Israeli assault on Gaza is one of the worst human rights violations we have seen in decades," says Judy Rebick, "people of conscience must speak out".

The Canadian government has not condemned Israel's clear violation of international law and war crimes in the Gaza Strip, which is consistent with their longstanding policy of unconditional support for Israel. Stephen Harper's government was the first foreign country to cut aid to Palestine in 2006.

"We are calling upon the Canadian government to act immediately and demand that Israel halt their aggression upon the population of Gaza. Canada must also demand that Israel ends the siege on Gaza and open the borders to allow for food, medicine, water and other essentials to life." said Khaled Mouammar, President of the Canadian Arab Federation.

United Nations Human Rights Rapporteur in the Occupied Territories, Richard Falk, spoke directly to foreign governments like Canada, saying: "The Israeli airstrikes today, and the catastrophic human toll that they caused, challenge those countries that have been and remain complicit, either directly or indirectly, in Israel's violations of international law. That complicity includes...those countries who have supported and participated in the siege of Gaza that itself has caused a humanitarian catastrophe."

The coalition is calling for all Canadians to demonstrate against the Israeli assault on Gaza and to rally the Canadian government to condemn Israel's war crimes, to lift the siege on the people of Gaza, and to cut Canada's military and economic ties with Israel until such time as it complies with international law. People will demonstrate and march in Toronto this coming Saturday January 3, 2009 at Dundas Square at 2pm.

The demonstration has been endorsed by many civil society organizations from around the country.

For more information, please contact:
Palestine House Media
416-890-3703



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Gaza Strip?

The Gaza Strip is a small area of about 360 square kilometres, approximately the size of the city of Montreal. It is one of the most densely populated places on earth.

During the ethnic cleansing that accompanied the establishment of Israel in 1948, about 200,000 Palestinians were expelled from areas that are now in the center and south of Israel to the Gaza Strip, quadrupling the number of people that had been living there.

The Gaza Strip was under Egyptian control until it was occupied by Israel in 1967. In 1994, the Palestinian Authority, which is a limited self-rule authority created by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, received limited powers to administer parts of the Gaza Strip.

Israel withdrew its illegal settlers and army bases in 2005 but continues to be the occupying power.

Today, about 1.5 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip, 1.1 million of them are refugees expelled in 1948 from their homes and lands in what is now Israel. Around 40% of the Gazan population live in eight refugee camps.

Did Israel end its occupation of the Gaza Strip in 2005?

No. Despite withdrawing its illegal settlements and army bases from the Gaza Strip in 2005 it remained the occupying force according to international law.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Territory, Prof. John Dugard, stated in 2008:

“The test for determining whether a territory is occupied under international law is effective control, and not the permanent physical presence of the occupying Power’s military forces in the territory in question. Judged by this test it is clear that Israel remains the occupying Power as technological developments have made it possible for Israel to assert control over the people of Gaza without a permanent military presence.”

Israel continued to control the border crossings, Gaza’s airspace and territorial waters, and the Palestinian Population Registry. It exercised effective control through military incursion, rocket attacks, sonic booms and air raids. Technological developments made it possible for Israel to assert control over the area and the people without having a permanent military presence.

Based on these facts, and judging the situation according to international law standards, Professor Dugard concluded that “The fact that Gaza remains occupied territory means that Israel’s actions towards Gaza must be measured against the standards of international humanitarian law.”

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



FAQ continued

Did Hamas violate the ceasefire as Israel claims?

No. This is an Israeli myth.

Hamas respected their side of the ceasefire, except on those occasions early on when Israel carried out major offensives against the civilian population in the West Bank. In the last two months, the Israeli military broke the ceasefire and killed 17 Palestinians.

Furthermore, Israel did not live up to any of its obligations under the terms of the ceasefire. This included ending the siege and allowing vital humanitarian aid to resume in Gaza. Rather than the average of 450 trucks per day being allowed across the border, on the best days only eighty have been allowed in – with the border remaining hermetically sealed 70% of the time. Throughout the supposed ‘cease-fire’ Gazans have been forced to live like animals, with a total of 262 dying due to the inaccessibility of proper medical care.

Now after hundreds dead and counting, it is Israel who refuses to re-enter talks over a cease-fire. They are not intent on securing peace as they claim; it is more and more clear that they are seeking regime change – whatever the cost.

Isn't Israel acting in self-defence?

No.

Israel has the most powerful military in the Middle East and is the largest recipient of US military aid in the world. In contrast, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have lived under military occupation since 1967 and lack any effective military capabilities.

According to United Nations statistics, from September 2000 to April 2008, the Israeli military killed 2677 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In the same period, 11 Israelis were killed by Palestinian home-made rockets.

In November 2008 (the last month of the cease-fire), at least 14 Palestinians were killed by Israeli military. Not a single Israeli was killed.

Over the last week, the Israeli military has killed over 400 Palestinians and nearly 2000 are critically injured. Five Israelis have been killed.

These figures make it clear who is really under attack.

But in order to really understand the disastrous situation in the Gaza Strip we need to look beyond the fatality statistics and understand that Israel's targeting of Palestinian civilians has a long history:

For over 19 months, Israel has placed the Gaza Strip under complete siege. Food, medical supplies, fuel and other necessities of life have not been allowed into the area.

Nearly half of the population in Gaza does not have enough food to meet its basic needs.

A total of 262 Palestinians have died because Israel's siege prevented them from receiving proper medical attention.

The reality is clear: over 1.5 million Gazans effectively live in an open-air prison and are now being bombed by the most powerful military force in the Middle East. To claim that Israel is acting in self-defence is simply to engage in ‘blaming the victim’ and to obscure where the real culpability lies.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Are Israel's actions in compliance with international law?

No. Israeli indiscriminate bombardment of the Gaza Strip constitutes a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention to which Israel is a signatory.

The places that Israel has targeted include schools, mosques, a university that provides education to over 20,000 students, private homes, densely populated refugee camps, police stations, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, the Palestine Legislative Council. All of these are clearly not military installations, and targeting them is considered a breach of the Geneva Conventions.

The high death toll also attests to Israeli indifference to Palestinian suffering. Until Thursday 1 January 2009, 5:00 PM (Eastern Time), about 414 Palestinians had been killed and more than 2,000 injured. In the first day of 2009 21 Palestinians were killed in Israeli air raids, including 11 children and 9 women.

Professor Richard Falk, a world-renowned authority on international law, and the current UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Territory issued a statement accusing Israel of massive and severe violations of international law, including collective punishment, targeting civilians and disproportionate military response.

In addition to the destruction visited on the Gaza Strip. Israel is also blocking aid and supplies from arriving to the Gaza Strip, leaving the Palestinians in the Strip on the brink of famine, and the already impoverished hospitals with little ability to provide health services.

What can we do to bring peace to the region?

First, we need to understand that peace is impossible without justice.

Palestinians must be allowed to live free of occupation and those driven from their homes and lands in 1948 must be allowed to return. These are basic human rights and the essential preconditions for peace.

The renowned legal scholar and UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Territories, Richard Falk, recently wrote "I call on all Member States [of the UN], as well as officials and every relevant organ of the United Nations system, to move on an emergency basis not only to condemn Israel's serious violations, but to develop new approaches to providing real protection for the Palestinian people."

The Canadian government is doing precisely the opposite. The Harper Conservatives have consistently provided full economic and political support to Israel's war crimes. Indeed, in the light of that abject failure of all of Canada's three main political parties to secure real protection for the Palestinian people it is up to us - the Canadian people - to demand an effective response.

There are historical precedents. In the struggle against South African Apartheid, the Canadian government placed sanctions on the South African apartheid regime until it complied with international law. Likewise, the Canadian government do the same today. We must raise our voices loudly and demand that Canada ends all complicity with Israel's siege on Gaza. We must demand clearly that Canada severs all links with the Israeli government until it fully complies with international law.



Canada's Position

The Canadian government has not condemned Israel's clear violation of international law and war crimes in the Gaza Strip, which is consistent with their longstanding policy of unconditional support for Israel. Stephen Harper's government was the first foreign country to cut aid to Palestine in 2006.

On December 27, 2008, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued the following statement:

The Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today issued the following statement regarding the situation in Israel and the Gaza Strip: "Canada is deeply concerned by the escalation of violence in Southern Israel and the Gaza Strip and by the loss of life and the suffering sustained by all sides. "Israel has a clear right to defend itself against the continued rocket attacks by Palestinian militant groups which have deliberately targeted civilians. First and foremost, those rocket attacks must stop. At the same time, we urge both sides to use all efforts to avoid civilian casualties and to create the conditions to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access to those in need in Gaza. "In addition to calling for immediate calm, we urge renewed efforts to reach a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel and for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to remain committed to finding a comprehensive peace settlement."



United Nations Condemns Israeli Assault

The overwhelming majority of the international community has strongly condemned the recent Israeli attacks on Palestinians in Gaza. In particular, the United Nations, has strongly condemned the attacks on a besieged population in Gaza.

UN human rights chief expresses her grave concern in the escalating violence in Gaza, 28 December 2008

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay expressed her grave concern and distress at the enormous loss of life in the escalating violence in Gaza. While condemning the rocket attacks by Hamas that led to the death of one Israeli civilian, she also strongly condemned Israel's disproportionate use of force resulting in the reported death of more than 270, a large number of which were civilians, and the wounding of over 600 persons. She called on Israel's leaders to uphold international humanitarian law principles, especially those relating to proportionality in the use of military force and the prevention of collective punishment and the targeting of civilians. She also called on Israel to lift the air, sea and ground blockade it is imposing on the 1.5 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, and to allow humanitarian assistance and independent outside monitoring, including by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied by Israel since 1967. The High Commissioner voiced her strong support for the Secretary General and the UN Security Council's statements calling for an immediate halt to all violence by both sides, and urged all parties to promptly take steps to end the human suffering in Gaza.

Richard Falk, United Nations special rapporteur for human rights in the Occupied Territories, December 29, 2008

The Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip represent severe and massive violations of international humanitarian law as defined in the Geneva Conventions, both in regard to the obligations of an Occupying Power and in the requirements of the laws of war.

Those violations include:

- **Collective punishment:** The entire 1.5 million people who live in the crowded Gaza Strip are being punished for the actions of a few militants.
- **Targeting civilians:** The airstrikes were aimed at civilian areas in one of the most crowded stretches of land in the world, certainly the most densely populated area of the Middle East.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



continued, **United Nations Condemns Israeli Assault**

- Disproportionate military response: The airstrikes have not only destroyed every police and security office of Gaza's elected government, but have killed and injured hundreds of civilians; at least one strike reportedly hit groups of students attempting to find transportation home from the university.

Earlier Israeli actions, specifically the complete sealing off of entry and exit to and from the Gaza Strip, have led to severe shortages of medicine and fuel (as well as food), resulting in the inability of ambulances to respond to the injured, the inability of hospitals to adequately provide medicine or necessary equipment for the injured, and the inability of Gaza's besieged doctors and other medical workers to sufficiently treat the victims.

Certainly the rocket attacks against civilian targets in Israel are unlawful. But that illegality does not give rise to any Israeli right, neither as the Occupying Power nor as a sovereign state, to violate international humanitarian law and commit war crimes or crimes against humanity in its response. I note that Israel's escalating military assaults have not made Israeli civilians safer; to the contrary, the one Israeli killed today after the upsurge of Israeli violence is the first in over a year.

Israel has also ignored recent Hamas diplomatic initiatives to re-establish the truce or ceasefire since its expiration on December 26.

The Israeli airstrikes today, and the catastrophic human toll that they caused, challenge those countries that have been and remain complicit, either directly or indirectly, in Israel's violations of international law. That complicity includes those countries knowingly providing the military equipment including warplanes and missiles used in these illegal attacks, as well as those countries who have supported and participated in the siege of Gaza that itself has caused a humanitarian catastrophe.

I remind all Member States of the United Nations that the UN continues to be bound to an independent obligation to protect any civilian population facing massive violations of international humanitarian law--regardless of what country may be responsible for those violations. I call on all Member States, as well as officials and every relevant organ of the United Nations system, to move on an emergency basis not only to condemn Israel's serious violations, but to develop new approaches to providing real protection for the Palestinian people.

UNRWA Statement on Gaza, December 29, 2008

The Commissioner- General of UNRWA, Karen AbuZayd, expressed her horror to the extensive destruction visited upon Gaza Strip today and her deep sadness at the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



continued, United Nations Condemns Israeli Assault

terrible loss in human life. UNRWA, the United Nation's Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, strongly urges the Israeli Government to heed calls for ceasing its bombardment on Gaza. Israel is a signatory to international conventions that protect non-combatants in times of conflict. These conventions are worthless if they are not upheld.

UNRWA will exert all efforts to respond as quickly as possible to relieve suffering and pain. The killing and destruction today follows weeks of a tight blockade that prevented UNRWA, and other humanitarian agencies, from assisting the population and mitigating the difficult economic situation. The population is already paying the price of the prolonged blockade, 1.5 million people are unable to fulfill their basic needs, and they now face military escalation.

UNRWA recognizes Israel's legitimate security concerns; however, its actions should be in conformity with international humanitarian law and it should not use disproportionate force. UNRWA calls on Israel to guarantee humanitarian agencies unrestricted and secure access into Gaza and respect its obligations under international humanitarian law by ensuring the safety of the Palestinian civilian population

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; UN Humanitarian Chief:
The Situation in Gaza is "Grim and Miserable", 15 February 2008**

John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator expressed shock at the living conditions in the Gaza Strip and deplored the current restrictions on the flow of humanitarian aid and commercial goods in and out of the area.

"I have been shocked by the grim and miserable things that I have seen and heard today, which are the result of current restrictions and the limitations on the number of goods that are being allowed into Gaza," said Mr. Holmes during a day-long visit to the Gaza Strip. "Around 80 percent of the population is dependant on food aid from international organizations. Poverty and unemployment are increasing and the private sector has more or less collapsed. Only ten percent of the amount of goods that entered Gaza a year ago are being permitted to enter now," he said.

Mr. Holmes visited Gaza to assess the impact on the civilian population of the closure of key crossings for commercial and humanitarian goods. He visited the sewage lagoons at Beit Lahiya, where he witnessed the precarious state of the waste water system and the growing problems of supplying people living in Gaza with fresh water. While at the Shifa hospital in Gaza City, Mr. Holmes heard from the director about the potentially disastrous effects of the crossing closures on the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



continued, **United Nations Condemns Israeli Assault**

dialysis and neo-natal wards, both of which rely on consistent supplies of fuel and electricity and spare parts for life saving medical equipment.

Mr. Holmes travelled to the Karni crossing, the major transport route into Gaza that has been closed for all exports and the majority of imports since June 2007. While at Karni, he met the manager of the Karni Industrial Zone to discuss how the United Nations could best support the re-opening of Karni and all other commercial crossings into Gaza.

“What’s essential to alleviate this situation is the opening of crossings to allow a lot more humanitarian and non-humanitarian goods to enter Gaza so people can lead better lives and have a minimum of human dignity,” Mr. Holmes said. “These are points I will be making to the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority later in my trip,” he added.

Later, Mr. Holmes was briefed by United Nations staff, including officials from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about strengthening humanitarian programmes to better address the impact of the closures.

On Saturday, 16 February, Mr. Holmes will travel to the West Bank to assess the impact of the restrictions on the movement of people, goods and services on the lives of Palestinians living there. He will visit the Augusta Victoria hospital as well as Bethlehem and Hebron.



Suggested Contacts (page one)

In Gaza:

Dr. Haider Eid (English and Arabic) + 972 59 9441766
haidareid@yahoo.com
Free Gaza Movement

Natalie Abu Shakra (Arabic and English) +972 598336 328
Free Gaza Movement

In South Africa:

Eddie Makue, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches – 082 853 8781

Ronnie Kasrils
082 784 9236

Professor Steven Friedman
072 480 6483

Salim Vally
Professor, Education Policy Unit, School of Education, University of Witwatersrand in South Africa
082 802 5936

In Toronto:

Michael Mandel
Professor, Osgoode Hall Law School
Specialization: International Humanitarian Law
MMandel@osgoode.yorku.ca

Mazen Masri
PHD Candidate, Osgood Hall Law School
Specialization: International Law and Refugees
mazenMasri@osgoode.yorku.ca

Adam Hanieh
PHD Candidate Political Science, York University
Specialization: Rights of Children in Occupied Territories
ahanieh@yorku.ca

Shaila Kibria
Executive Director, Islamic Relief
Specialization: Humanitarian Aid in Gaza
Executivedirector@islamicreliefcanada.org
www.islamicreliefcanada.org

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Suggested Contacts (page two)

Organizations:

Dr. Farid Ayad
President, Palestine House
info@palestinehouse.com
Cell: 416-473-1189

Khaled Mouammar
National President, Canadian Arab Federation
Cell: 416-879-6766

Jenny Peto
Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid
www.caiaweb.org
Cell: 416-889-4746

Andy Lehrer
Steering Committee, Independent Jewish Voices (Canada)
Cell: 416-597-2740

Judy Deutsch
Independent Jewish Voices, President of Science for Peace.
She presented a paper to the plenary session of the Gaza Community
Mental Health Programme International Conference on the siege of Gaza
Cell: 416-890-3703 (please call Palestine House Media for contact)

Naomi Binderwall
Women in Solidarity with Palestine, International Jewish anti-Zionist Network
Cell: 416-890-3703 (please call Palestine House Media for contact)

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Further Reading

Eyewitness Accounts of Gaza Students

<http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news/article661>

Article on Gaza by Ali Abunemah, author of One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse

<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10055.shtml>

End the Carnage in Gaza, Boycott Israel

<http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/235>

Palestine's Guernica and the Myths of Israeli Victimhood by Mustafa Barghouthi

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mustafa-barghouthi/palestines-guernica-and-t_b_153958.html

'This is like apartheid': ANC veterans visit West Bank by Donald Macintyre in The Guardian

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/this-is-like-apartheid-anc-veterans-visit-west-bank-865063.html>

'I didn't see any of my girls, just a pile of bricks'

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/30/israel-and-the-palestinians-middle-east>

British telecom firm severs ties with Israeli counterparts

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3648346,00.html>

The Myth of Israeli Retaliation

<http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/20099>

Israeli Slaughter, International Culpability

<http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/20075>

Gaza: hospitals struggling to cope as fighting intensifies

<http://www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=30192&tid=001>