

END ISRAEL'S ASSAULT ON GAZA

Press Kit



Palestinehouse
educational and cultural centre



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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.”

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