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Operation Protective Edge: Stop the Carnage!

We, the undersigned, are united in calling for an end to Israel's obscene assault on Gaza.

Recently, three Israeli youth were kidnapped and murdered by Palestinian militants in the West Bank. Shortly after, Israeli youth kidnapped and murdered a Palestinian boy in Jerusalem. While reputedly searching for the Israeli teenagers, the Israeli army invaded the West Bank, terrorizing the population, ransacking hundreds of homes, arresting 500 individuals, most of whom had nothing to do with the crime, and killing seven Palestinian civilians. Dozens more men, women and children were critically injured.

In response, Hamas and other Gaza militant groups launched volleys of rockets on Israel. As of this writing (7/15), one Israeli has died.

A few days ago, Israeli initiated Operation Protective Edge in Gaza. The air force has flown over a thousand sorties, bombing both military and civilians targets almost indiscriminately. It has bombed many private homes filled with Gaza civilians, while claiming it is destroying the homes of alleged Hamas leaders (even so, this is inexcusable, as it amounts to summary execution). At least three entire families have been killed by such attacks in separate incidents.

A ground invasion has begun and Israel has authorized 40,000 reservists to be called up for duty. Tanks encircle the enclave ready for action. Nearly 200 Gazans have been killed, half of them women and children. According to a UN report, nearly 80% are civilians.

Even before this attack, Gaza was an open-air prison in which its 1.8-million residents were besieged by Israel and Egypt, allowing virtually nothing except essential items in through the borders. The siege of Gaza alone is a stark violation of international law. Operation Protective Edge, whose impact has fallen almost entirely on the civilian population, is an even more egregious violation.

Israel claims the rockets fired by Hamas are an unprovoked attack on Israel's civilian population. This is not true. The missile assault was in direct response to Israel's terrifying the entire population of the West Bank. Israel's assault preceded the Gaza rockets.

Kidnapping and murder of Israeli and Palestinian civilians, terrorizing Palestinians in the West Bank, and firing missiles at civilian targets are all unacceptable. Israel's collective punishment of the Palestinian population and Hamas's targeting of civilians constitute war crimes. Clearly, Israel's actions, executed by the fourth most powerful army in the world, have been far more lethal than the Palestinian response. The massive air assault has been vastly disproportionate in nature and in effect.

This legal framework, however is inadequate to fully understand what is happening. All the events of the last month should be understood in the context of Israel's 47-year long occupation of Palestinian territories and the daily subjugation and humiliation of an entire people, theft of their lands and water resources, destruction of their homes, and denial of their national right to self-determination. The deprivation of the rights of the Palestinian people has been an organic aspect of the Zionist project, which has been supported by the Western imperial powers since 1917.

91% of Israelis polled said they supported the government's conduct in the war. But we know there are Israelis who either oppose it outright or have severe doubts about the wisdom of this policy. In coming days, as the war drags on with little to show but more killing, we hope more Israeli voices will be raised. We applaud those who stand up for human dignity and against their government's war policy in the face of such suffering. We know how difficult this must be in the face of such unbridled patriotic fervor.

The U.S. and international community have stood by and watched while Gaza burns. In a public statement, the Obama administration denounced the firing of rockets at Israel but made no mention of the massive air assault on Gaza. This shows an appalling moral obtuseness. The only mildly critical statement toward Israel it could manage was to oppose a ground invasion. This weak, ineffectual response which will do nothing to stop the killing.

The current war and especially an escalating ground invasion must be resolutely opposed by the world community. If Israel proceeds with such an onslaught, sanctions should be threatened. The Security Council must take action to call the Gaza attack what it is: the wholesale slaughter of a civilian population.

There is an international consensus on the necessary first steps to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: a return to 1967 borders, Jerusalem as the shared capital of the two peoples, and the right of refugees expelled during the Nakba to return to Israel. Any efforts to conclude peace not based on these principles will fail the test of justice and will not be long-lived. The clash of armies and militant groups will never solve the conflict. A political solution is the only way. If the parties cannot agree to this themselves then the international community must step in to force a resolution.

Pursuit of military solutions renders the BDS movement an even more potent tool to hold Israel accountable for its violations of human rights and international law. It stands for the above principles along with a call for Israel to be a state offering full, equal rights to its Palestinian citizens. This grassroots international movement is a worthy means of dramatizing opposition to Israel's Occupation.

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