

Stop the Slaughter in Gaza - Free Palestine!

For the past two years, the people of Gaza have been subjected to collective punishment for electing the “wrong” government in free and fair elections. Despite the Israeli claims to have withdrawn from Gaza in 2005, it has never ceased to be occupied under the definitions of international law. Israel has continued to control the coast, borders and air space, so that Palestinian fishermen have been prevented from getting into their boats while a stranglehold over the crossings by both Israel and Egypt meant that supplies of fuel, food, medicines, paper, building materials - in fact just about all the necessities of life - have been controlled at the whim of the Israeli government. Gaza has been under siege: its supposed freedom since the Israeli “withdrawal” is merely the freedom of the ghetto. Israel has continued to carry out raids and “targeted assassinations” at will.

Now Israel has launched an aerial bombardment and a ground invasion causing hundreds of civilian casualties. Its pretext is the breakdown of the ceasefire with the Hamas government. Yet the truth is that Hamas respected the ceasefire, except when Israel carried out major offensives in the West Bank. The ceasefire broke down when once again the Israeli forces killed several Palestinians.

Meanwhile Israel did not live up to its obligations which were supposed to be part of the ceasefire agreement, namely ending the siege and allowing humanitarian aid to resume. Mustafa Barghouti, the Secretary General of the Palestinian National Initiative, says: “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.”

Israel claims to be targeting Hamas militants, yet the overwhelming majority of the victims of the violence have been civilians. A police graduation ceremony became a massacre. University buildings have been bombed, as have UN-run schools in which ordinary Gazans were taking shelter. The pictures of dead and injured children, grieving parents and desperate physicians on our TV screens are an affront to humanity. Press reports now indicate that phosphorus and depleted uranium weapons are being deployed against a civilian population which has nowhere to run to. These are nothing short of war crimes.

We support the right of the Palestinian people to elect the government of their choice without outside interference, and to resist the occupation, by armed struggle if necessary, as is recognized under international law. While condemning all forms of terrorism - acts of violence against civilians - we despise the hypocrisy of governments who reserve their condemnation for the rockets fired by Hamas while ignoring the occupation and siege which gave rise to them and the totally disproportionate use of force by Israel.

We call on our politicians to bring about an immediate ceasefire without conditions and for a lifting of the siege of Gaza. Only international pressure on Israel will bring this about. There must be no upgrade in Israel's relations with the EU until Israel complies with international law and basic human rights. Indeed, the EU-Israel association agreement should now be suspended and EU countries should sever diplomatic relations with Israel as Venezuela has done.

We call on UCU members to support the demonstrations around the country for the human rights of the Palestinian people and for an end to Israeli occupation and aggression. We urge UCU members to lobby their MPs, MSPs, Members of the Welsh Assembly and MEPs for sanctions against Israel. We call on the union's leadership to put pressure on the British government to stop swallowing the lies emanating from the Israeli embassy's PR machine and to distance itself from the supine collaboration of the US government. We encourage all forms of non-violent protest in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Palestine.

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