

CONCERNED AFRICANS FORUM



Promoting Progressive
African Thought Leadership

STATEMENT ON ISRAEL'S AGGRESSION

1. The Israeli government's latest air and sea military assault and land invasion in the Gaza is the third in five years. This criminal conduct is again extremely disproportionate and violates all rules of International Humanitarian Law and the Geneva Convention which governs the rules of war pertaining to civilians. The air and sea bombardment of this de facto concentration camp interning 1.8 million Palestinians has resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of casualties, including women and children and the extermination of entire families. There has been massive destruction of property and infrastructure including mosques, hospitals, schools, and electricity and water systems. Equally tragic, a new group of Palestinian refugees has been created.
2. The enormity of the tragedy was captured by Jonathan Whittal, head of humanitarian analysis of Medicine Without Borders. He commented that working in the Gaza was akin to being "in an open-air prison to patch up prisoners in between their torture sessions... they can't leave and only the most limited supplies essential for basic survival are allowed to enter..." He then plaintively asks "at what point does MSF repeated medical action in an unacceptable situation like Gaza become complicity with aggression and oppression?"
3. The collective punishment of innocent Palestinian men, women, and children is, therefore, criminal, barbaric and constitutes a war crime which must be condemned. The powerful Israeli lobby supported by major western governments and the media, including sections of the South African media, have launched an orchestrated campaign to convey the message that Israel acted in response to the killing of three Israeli youth and in "self-defence." Major western powers and media have publically supported Israel's "self-defence" response yet have conveniently ignored or distorted the basic facts. It is worth recounting these:
 - In 1948 Israel was created by violent dispossession of Palestinian land and under the pretext of "self-defence" proceeded to occupy Palestinian territories. Many Palestinians have been systematically and forcibly removed from their property;

agricultural infrastructure has been destroyed; and an apartheid wall has been built which cuts off families from their kin, work, land, mosques, schools, hospitals etc.. Palestinians continue to be subjected to all sorts of inhumane and humiliating treatment: they have to carry colour coded IDs and are subjected to a permit system which is actually worse than the apartheid pass laws system; a highway infrastructure system has been put in place which protects illegal Israeli settlements but which Palestinians cannot use; and resisting Israeli occupation has resulted in thousands of Palestinians being killed, imprisoned or forced into exile. All these atrocities have been carried out to achieve an exclusive Zionist state. It is a matter of historical record that Palestinian violence has been a response to an aggressive Zionist agenda.

- Hamas has denied involvement in the killing of the three Israeli youth. However, there is much evidence to suggest that the Israeli government knew within hours that the youth had been killed and who the prime suspects were. The Israeli intelligence agency, Shin Bet, ordered the Israeli media not to report this information. Netanyahu and the Israel lobby went viral by mobilizing international support to “find and save our boys.” At the same time and as part of this Israeli subterfuge, over 500 Hamas supporters in the West Bank were arrested, more than 12 Palestinians were killed, and the bombing of Gaza started. A poll released on the 2 July revealed that 76% of Jewish Israelis supported the Israeli military and the gagging order imposed by the Sin Bet.
- Rocket attacks by Hamas have been at their lowest level for the last 12 years and the recent rocket attacks against Israel were a response to egregious Israeli military aggression. Israel, with massive US support, has been able to build an effective defense system against rocket attacks and Israeli casualties from such attacks have been limited. Yet Israel has cynically exploited the rocket attacks as justification of their illegal military aggression. There is growing suspicion that some of the rocket attacks have actually been carried out by Israeli agents. We therefore urge legitimate Palestinian organizations to halt the rocket attacks so as to deny Israel and its supporters any justification for “self-defense.” This crisis situation demands that the Palestinians in the occupied territories seek new and creative forms of resistance which involve Palestinians in Israel as well as progressive and democratic Israelis and other exploited and persecuted minorities in Israel. The international solidarity movement must be mobilized to support all such initiatives.
- The land invasion by Israel which has dramatically increased Palestinian casualties has been justified on the grounds of destroying Hamas tunnels used to infiltrate weapons and to build Hamas’ infrastructure. It is common knowledge that since the military takeover in Egypt, most tunnels have been closed and the movement of Palestinians through Egyptian checkpoints has been severely restricted. The latest aggression should be seen as another response to the recent agreement between Fatah and Hamas to form a “national reconciliation” government. This, for the first time in many years, has provided a united Palestinian opposition to Israel’s final solution policies in the occupied territories. It should come as no surprise that after the agreement was signed, Israeli violence against Palestinians by the Israeli army and settlers suddenly increased, culminating in the latest land, air, and sea assault.
- The aggression against the Palestinians is part of the broader Sunni-Shite conflict in the whole Middle East region. Some Gulf States are cooperating with Israel to destroy Hamas, the Assad government in Syria, and the government of Iran. This

is why Hamas rejected a peace plan because no peace plan can be imposed on it or any other Palestinian organisation. Hamas must be treated as an equal partner in any truce negotiations. The stark reality is that Israel has never negotiated in good faith. Genuine negotiations are incompatible with the logic of the Zionist state and Israel has continued to change facts on the ground by forcibly expropriating Palestinian land and dramatically expanding illegal Israeli settlements. Moreover, Israel has systematically violated all agreements to find a negotiated solution.

- The kidnapping and killing of three Israeli youth is a tragic consequence of the policies of the Israeli government and the refusal of successive Israeli administrations to genuinely implement the Oslo Agreement and all subsequent agreements. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitsak Rabin, who made some serious compromises, is but one example of Israeli political realities. The failure of the recent US peace initiative driven by Secretary of State John Kerry is also a consequence of Israeli intransigence and continued failure to accept a two-state solution based on UN resolutions. Israel has arrogantly rejected all UN and other resolutions regarding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The US government has aided and abetted Israel by using its veto powers on the UN Security Council to obstruct and prevent any mandatory international sanctions against Israel.
4. The Israeli lobby in South Africa, represented by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and the SA Zionist Federation, reacted angrily to an ANC statement condemning the military aggression against defenseless Palestinians in Gaza and once again has equated all criticisms of Israel's atrocities with anti-Semitism. This is another example of the Israeli lobby's refusal to accept any criticism of Israel and to rather blame the victims, the Palestinian people. The ANC statement was a correct response to Israel's policies of ethnic cleansing and must be followed up by concrete solidarity activities in support of the Palestinian people. The brutal fascist regimes in the 1940's and the consequences of the Holocaust were correctly condemned by millions of people throughout the world. And millions lost their lives fighting the evils of Nazism. The ANC's message "lest we forget" and "never again" is thus very relevant in relation to the Palestinian people today.
 5. The guilt complex of some western governments, their geo-strategic interests, and the presence of a powerful Israeli lobby are not sufficient justification for the overt or covert complicity of the UN Security Council and major western governments in the atrocities carried out against the Palestinian people. Sadly, the myth has once again been propagated that the victims are the aggressors and the aggressors are the victims who have carte blanche to act in "self-defence." The UN once declared apartheid in South Africa to be a "crime against humanity." Israeli policies and practices with regard to the Palestinian people are actually worse than the apartheid regime and campaigns must be intensified to similarly declare Israel's policies in the occupied territories to be a "crime against humanity."
 6. There have been huge demonstrations in South Africa and throughout the world as expressions of moral outrage against Israel's naked aggression. The time is now ripe to intensify the isolation and sanctions campaign against Israel. As successfully conducted against apartheid South Africa, this must

include an economic, academic, cultural, sporting, and arms embargo. Public demonstrations in South Africa must be complemented by picketing all institutions which directly or indirectly do business with Israel including shopping centers and retail outlets. The University of Johannesburg's severing of academic links with Ben Gurion University must be followed by similar actions by other South African and African universities; South African sporting and cultural bodies must declare Israel a "no-go area"; religious leaders must speak out and campaign against the Israel's military aggression in Gaza; and the South African Ambassador to Israel must be recalled for consultations.

7. The Indian novelist and winner of the 1997 Booker Prize, Arundhati Roy, warned us: "never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you...never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple...try and understand, never look away. And never, never to forget."

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