



Medical Association for Prevention of War

MAPW statement on Israel – Palestine conflict in Gaza December 2012

The blockade: humanitarian and health outcomes

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the land, air and sea blockade on the Gaza Strip — imposed by Israel following Hamas's election in Gaza in June 2007 and intensifying an already existing closure applied since the early 1990s — is a denial of basic human rights, amounting to collective punishment, and is in contravention of international law.

- The continued ban on the transfer of goods from Gaza to its traditional markets in the West Bank and Israel, along with severe restrictions on access to agricultural land and fishing waters, prevents sustainable growth and perpetuates the high levels of unemployment, food insecurity and aid dependency.
- 35% of Gaza's farmland and 85% of its fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible due to Israeli imposed restrictions.
- 44% of Gazans are food insecure and about 80% are aid recipients.

The UN OCHA goes on to report that:

- Import restrictions, including of basic building materials, have led to the digging of multiple tunnels under the border with Egypt. The restrictions, the huge reconstruction needs and the lack of employment opportunities have pushed thousands of workers, some of them children, to risk their lives every day, (till their recent destruction), in the "tunnels industry".
- The quality of infrastructure and vital services in the areas of health, education, water and sanitation has significantly declined as a result of the import restrictions and rapid population growth. Despite the June 2010 measures to ease the blockade, international organisations continue to face challenges in responding to the most urgent human needs, due to the complex approval system for projects put in place by the Israeli authorities.
- Israel's policy of separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which includes severe restrictions on the movement of goods and people between the two areas, prevents people's access to services (including higher education) and livelihoods, disrupts family life, and undermines the viability of the two-state solution.

Further contravention of international humanitarian law

Lack of compliance by all sides with international humanitarian law during escalations continues to result in civilian deaths and injuries. The use of civilian built-up areas by armed groups to launch indiscriminate attacks on southern Israel, as well as the methods employed by the Israeli military to enforce restrictions on access to border areas raise further serious protection concerns.

November 2012 conflict

Over eight days during the November 2012 armed conflict in Gaza, Israel deployed F-16s, attack helicopters and warships to fire on the densely populated territory of more than 1.7 million people. Over 167 Palestinians were killed, 89 of them civilians, at least 26 of them children. Injury estimates numbered 1,269.

6 Israelis (4 civilians and 2 soldiers) were killed in Palestinian rocket attacks, while roadside bombings and a bus bombing injured 17 people.

Israel's nuclear weapons

Israel has a nuclear arsenal, but maintains the right to attack Iran to stop Iran developing nuclear weapons.

Israel refused, this month, to attend a March 2013 conference in Finland to discuss a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone. All other Middle Eastern countries pulled out as a result, and the conference was cancelled. NGOs will conduct a meeting in Helsinki on the planned date even so.

Any use of nuclear weapons will cause catastrophic humanitarian harm, including immediate deaths, long term disease, inter-generational harm, and, in some scenarios, possible starvation in other parts of the world due to the effects on world climate.

MAPW's position

MAPW recognises the grave health and humanitarian situation in Gaza, now worsened by recent conflict.

MAPW supports the rights of Israelis and Palestinians to live free from violent conflict and insecurity.

MAPW acknowledges and agrees with the many citizens in both Israel and Gaza who are calling for peace and reconciliation, whether through the creation of two independent and secure states, or through the development of a single state in which all citizens have equal democratic and human rights, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

MAPW notes that Australia recently abstained from voting for Palestine's observer state status at the UN, and that this was preferable to voting against the motion

MAPW welcomes the reduction in border restrictions agreed to by Israeli authorities which will allow Gazans better access to fishing grounds and agricultural lands

MAPW calls for:

1. Full lifting of the blockade of Gaza to help restore the economic rights of the people, and to ease the health burden it imposes.
2. An immediate international and regional humanitarian effort on behalf of the people in Gaza to ease their suffering
3. A genuine peace process to commence with negotiations to ensure that the security needs of all civilians in this conflict are immediately met.
4. The appointment of an independent peace broker from a country that does not supply military hardware or other military support to either party.
5. Australia's use of its position on the UN Security Council to urge implementation of the recommendations of the UN fact finding mission into Operation Cast Lead in 2009, which resulted in the deaths of over 1400 people in Gaza (the Goldstone Report).
6. Israel to meet with other countries of the Middle East to further the establishment of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the region, first called for 25 years ago.

Sources

Gaza Blockade UN factsheet

www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_blockade_factsheet_june_2012_english.pdf

News report on effects of easing blockade, November 2012:

www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121124151832736999.html

United Nations 2009 Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict ("Goldstone Report")

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/factfindingmission.htm>

Palestine Centre for Human Rights

www.pchrgaza.org