

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad
Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit

Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO

Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO and UNICEF
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5 January 2009

Israeli Ambassador to Australia
Embassy of Israel
6 Turrana Street
Yarralumla ACT 2600

Your Excellency,

It is with heavy hearts and a deep sense of great sadness that we find it necessary to write to you once again. We write on behalf of the Australian Section of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) concerning the conflict in Gaza. We write to add the voice of our organisation to increasing calls from the international community for an immediate ceasefire. We note that the latest person to call for an immediate ceasefire is the Prime Minister of the UK.

While our organisation recognises that every nation state has the right to defend its territory and its citizens, the recent response of Israel to rocket fire from Hamas has, in our view, been disproportionate. Incidentally, this is also the view of the Secretary General of the UN who has condemned the "excessive use of force by Israel in Gaza". (Statement by the SG of 29 December 2008)

According to recent estimates from reliable Palestinian medical sources, the death toll from the recent attacks now stands at 500, 87 of whom are children. The UN has confirmed that 60 – 70 of the dead thus far are civilians. The Justice and Interior Ministries in Gaza have been shelled; mosques have also been targeted and bombed; houses of individual persons have been bombed and family members of Hamas operatives have been killed, once again including children. There is no electricity supply, no water and limited medical supplies are running low.

Clearly, in an area as densely populated as Gaza, civilians have been extremely severely impacted by the recent actions of the Israeli Defence Forces.

We can only conclude that the response of the Israeli Government to Hamas' rocket fire into southern Israel has been excessive. We concur with the view of the EU that Israel's right to self-defence does not allow the killing of civilians. Further, we believe that this killing is not in the long-term interests of anyone in the region including Israeli civilians, as these attacks will inevitably leave a legacy of bitterness for future generations.

Many opinion polls have shown that both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples broadly speaking want peace for themselves, their families and their communities. They are not well served by their governing authorities who, in our view, are escalating military violence on both sides of the conflict.

WILPF believes that these actions on the part of the Israeli state have not only been an overreaction but also a strategic mistake. Among many ordinary Arab people in the region, they have already increased sympathy for Hamas.

It is widely recognised that there can never be a military "solution" to the situation between Israel and the Palestinian people. Accordingly, WILPF calls for an immediate ceasefire and a resumption of the brokered peace talks. Negotiations must be immediately re-established through the appropriate intermediaries.

We will appreciate it if you could communicate to your government our very strong and earnest urging that they should agree to an immediate ceasefire, and come to the negotiation table to work towards a just, constructive and durable peace.

We thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell
Joint National Coordinators