

Global Support Needed for the Israeli Peace Movement

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Given recent and current events in Gaza, there is a critical need for peace activists throughout the world to be in solidarity with their Israeli brothers and sisters. It is not easy to be a peace activist in a country whose history with Palestinians has involved several battles in an ongoing war.

On January 3, 2009 twenty-one Israeli peace organizations held a demonstration and a march to oppose Israeli action in Gaza. Led by Gush Shalom and the Women's Coalition for Peace, over ten thousand demonstrators held banners with messages such as "One does not build an election campaign over the dead bodies of children!"; "Orphans and widows are not election propaganda!"; "All cabinet ministers are war criminals!"; and, "Enough, enough – speak with Hamas!".

The Israeli government has conducted an intense propaganda campaign arguing that the fight against Hamas meets just war criteria and that Hamas must be destroyed to protect the security of the state of Israel. Public opinion polls in Israel show the military move into Gaza enjoys widespread support. The government has convinced most Israelis and the Western press, especially the US media, that Israel is doing everything possible to avoid harming civilians. Yariv Oppenheimer, secretary general of Peace Now, has stated that there is a consensus in the peace movement in favor of a cease fire and negotiated arrangements to keep the peace. He states, "this war is hurting so many innocent civilians and causing so much misery and suffering on the Palestinian side that you can't just ignore it and go on with your life". Gideon Levy, a liberal columnist for the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, has written that Israelis have become brutalized by this conflict, insensitive to the massive civilian loss of life. "Everything is permitted, legitimate and just," Levy wrote. "Israel liquidated Hamas leader Nizar Rayan. Nobody counts the 20 women and children who lost their lives in the same attack. Palestinians dying in hospitals that lack medical equipment... Our hearts have turned hard and our eyes have become dull".

Professor Oren Yiftachel who teaches political geography and urban planning at Ben-Gurion University has written extensively on the political geography of ethnic conflict. He is an active member of several peace and civil society organizations and a founding member of Faculty for Israel-Palestine Peace (FFIPP). Yiftachel recently wrote the following:

One may look at the current invasion to Gaza not only as an 'operation' to stop Hamas' rockets; a pre-election effort to boost popularity by cynical Israeli leaders; nor an attempt to re-establish Israel's deterrence following the failure of the second Lebanon War of 2006. This invasion and destruction of Gaza is neither only a colonial attempt to 'create a new political order' among neighboring nations, or an imperial (American-Israeli) push to control insurgent Arab societies. The current attack on Gaza is of course all these, but also – and most importantly, another step in the long-standing project of silencing, fragmenting, breaking and annihilating Palestinian history and collective

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existence. The erasure project is conducted by nearly everybody in Israel – politicians, artists, the media, university researchers and intellectuals.¹

Another peace activist, Uri Avneri, was a former Zionist soldier in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War who later founded the peace organization Gush Shalom. Avneri has written that:

The Gaza blockade was a scientific experiment designed to find out how much one can starve a population and turn its life into hell before they break. This experiment was conducted with the generous help of Europe and the US. Up to now, it did not succeed. Hamas became stronger and the range of the Qassams became longer. The present war is a continuation of the experiment by other means.²

The foundational consensus among the Israeli-Palestinian peace movement consists of the following points:

- Israeli and Palestinian lives are equally precious.
- The Israeli and Palestinian peoples have equal rights to national self-determination and to live in peace and security.
- The Israeli and Palestinian peoples have equal rights to a fair share of the land and resources of historic Palestine.
- Two national states, Israel and Palestine, with equal sovereignty, equal rights and equal responsibilities.
- Partition along the pre-1967 border as modified only by mutually agreed territorial swaps.
- Israeli evacuation of all settlements in the occupied territories except those within the agreed swapped areas.
- Palestinian and Arab recognition of Israel and renunciation of any further territorial claims.
- Palestinian acceptance of negotiated limitations on the “right of return” in exchange for financial compensation for refugees.

Since the Israeli government engages in an intense campaign to discredit the Israeli peace movement and the Western media, especially the US, intentionally ignores the peace movement, it is critical that peace activists around the world as individuals and through organizations declare solidarity with their Israeli brethren. I urge all peace activists to regularly log on to the websites of the following Israeli peace groups:

[Gush Shalom](#)

[Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions \(Comitê Israelense contra a Demolição de Casas\)](#) –

[Bat Shalom, Israeli Women for Peace \(Bat Shalom, Mulheres Israelenses pela Paz\)](#) –

[Rabbis for Human Rights \(Rabinos pelos Direitos Humanos\)](#) -

[New Profile \(Novo Perfil\)](#)

¹ *Refugee Watch Online*, January 15, 2009. <http://refugeewatchonline.blogspot.com/2009/01/returning-time-to-gazans.html>.

² “Molten Lead in Gaza - How Israel is Multiplying Hamas by a Thousand”, January 2, 2009. <http://www.corkpsc.org/db.php?aid=96343>.

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Once one becomes familiar with the activities of the many peace organizations in Israel it will become apparent how global peace activists can engage in activity that will publicize and support peace efforts in Israel. Instead of simply criticizing the government of Israel, each of us has an obligation to become part of the solution by supporting the work of non-violent activists in Israel who are risking their careers and lives in the current crisis.