

## **PNGO Network calls for the UN and INGOs to stand by their mandates, and hold Israel accountable for persistent IHL violations**

The Israeli assault that began on 7 July 2014 has affected every sphere of life in Gaza. As of 13 August, nearly 2,000 people have been killed, including 458 children, and 9,986 people have been injured. At least 386,000 people have been displaced from their homes as 16,800 homes have been destroyed or severely damaged. Public infrastructure has similarly been razed: 25 schools are entirely destroyed, and another 230 schools have been damaged<sup>1</sup>. 15 hospitals have also been attacked, as well as 18 clinics<sup>2</sup>. According to the Gaza Federation of Industries, 175 factories have been targeted, and 63 construction companies are no longer functioning due to the substantial property and resource losses incurred<sup>3</sup>. Numerous water wells and Gaza's only power plant have also been destroyed. The removal of unexploded ordnance in civilian areas and UN premises including schools is now an urgent priority; six people were killed on 13 August when a police team attempted to defuse an Israeli missile<sup>4</sup>. Psycho-social support services are urgently needed to begin to treat trauma-related psychological disorders among adults and children alike. It should be clearly understood that this has not been an offensive against a military resistance, or against military infrastructure. It has been a savage assault upon the people of Gaza, and all aspects of their already-suffocated economic, social and political lives.

The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO) commends UN OCHA and the Gaza Ministry of Health for their work in gathering information in all sectors and documenting the wide-reaching impact of the Israeli assault. We applaud UNRWA and other UN agencies, including WFP, WHO and UNICEF, for their work sheltering the displaced population of Gaza, and in mobilizing and responding to the grave humanitarian needs at hand. We sincerely thank international organizations for their support of critical humanitarian interventions in Gaza, and for their commitment and dedication to securing human rights in Palestine. We would also like to express our appreciation to international communities who have shown their solidarity with the Palestinian people through protests, fundraising, campaigns and statements condemning the Israeli assault, and also to multiple Latin American countries that have taken strong political actions in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

With this said, we simultaneously and unconditionally condemn those members of the international community who have watched in silence or used evasive language in their public statements to describe the Israeli assault in Gaza. This evasive language has contributed to the well-established culture of impunity surrounding Israel's past and ongoing actions. During the recent assault, the United States gleefully replenished Israel's stocks of ammunition only hours after condemning an Israeli attack on a UN school being used as a shelter for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Jabalia.. The United States cannot provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinians as well as continuous military support to Israel simultaneously without facing both an economic and ethical complex. For this reason, we renew our call to Palestinian NGOs to boycott any conditional humanitarian aid or relief, including that of USAID. We also demand

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<sup>1</sup> UN OCHA Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 13 August 2014, 0800 hrs).

<sup>2</sup> UN OCHA Gaza Strip: Damaged Structures (as of 12 August 2014).

<sup>3</sup> New York Times, "Conflict Leaves Industry in Ashes and Gaza Reeling From Economic Toll", 6 August 2014.

<sup>4</sup> MA'AN News, "6 killed as unexploded Israeli missile blows up in northern Gaza", 13 August 2014.

that Palestinian, Arab and international NGOs providing aid in Gaza do not reward the occupation by purchasing Israeli products during the recovery and reconstruction process.

We demand that the Palestinian Authority sign the Rome Statute and refer the Israeli assault on Gaza to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We are disgusted by - and we condemn - the pressure from the international community to discourage the Palestinian Authority from joining the ICC. To ensure that Israel is held accountable for its actions, we urge INGOs to raise their voices and support Amnesty International's call for the Palestinian Authority to join the ICC, with a request to investigate Israel's recent offensive in Gaza<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, we assert that any ICC investigation must include the question of reparations for the damage Israel has inflicted on public and private infrastructure during the offensive. Alongside this, we also implore international NGOs to raise these issues with their respective governments to call for a comprehensive arms embargo to Israel, which has used such arms to commit countless war crimes within the occupied territories.

As the representative body for more than 145 Palestinian NGOs working to assert the human rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories, we note with dismay the overall weakness of the international NGO community's voice at the political level in response to this recent assault. Only 34 of 78 organizational members of the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) signed AIDA's 11 July statement, which, while calling for a ceasefire and durable solutions for peace, did not condemn the Israeli assault<sup>6</sup>. The organizations under the AIDA umbrella are our main partners for peace and development in the Palestinian territories, and as Palestinian NGOs we certainly expected a stronger stance from AIDA members. Unfortunately, we were left sorely disappointed in the level of solidarity shown with us as we continue to toil tirelessly to support our people. Whilst some organizations are yet to react officially at all, it took others more than two weeks to respond to the offensive against Gaza, by which time more than 700 Palestinians had been killed and 150,000 people displaced from their homes. Within these responses, the language remained evasive so as to avoid attributing blame for the humanitarian crisis now occurring in the Gaza Strip. Such statements offer little more than lip service and political pandering.

We call on the international community to intensify their assistance to Gaza and to seek to hasten the official declaration of Gaza Strip a "Humanitarian Disaster Zone". Emergency response and early recovery are the priorities for humanitarian assistance in the foreseeable future, and existing humanitarian projects in Gaza should now change their priorities to reflect this. We also call on international donors to assist in finding innovative solutions for the mounting energy, water and housing needs in Gaza by exploring a wide range of creative solutions, including "power ships", solar panels, desalination units and innovative and comfortable shelters.

PNGO congratulates UN OCHA for swiftly constructing and releasing its important appeal in response to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. We note that the appeal was put together in a short-time frame over the Eid holiday, when the offices of many Palestinian organizations were closed. Unfortunately, as a result, we are indeed concerned that this appeal may not reflect the

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<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International, "Israel/OPT: International Criminal Court key to breaking cycle of injustice for war crimes", 1 Aug 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), "34 organizations call for a ceasefire and sustained solution towards peace", via War Child website, 11 July 2014.

*real* needs of Gaza. We request that an ongoing mechanism be established to allow Palestinian and international organizations to apply for funding for specific, context-driven projects in Gaza, allowing more time for realistic assessment of priorities on the ground. We also stress the importance of international coordination and partnership with Palestinian NGOs, not only in implementation but in damage assessment and recovery, to ensure the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Finally, we demand that the international community publicly renew its opposition to the wider issues that plague the occupied territories, and which fundamentally create and support conditions in which these assaults on Gaza can continue to occur every two to three years, as if on cue. Specifically, we urge them to renew their rejection of the occupation, the en-masse forced displacement of Palestinians, the continued construction of settlements despite their affirmed illegality, and of the crippling restrictions on movement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, all of which have intensified during the Israeli offensive in Gaza. Since the beginning of Israeli military operations in the Strip, 24 Palestinians have been killed and 1,846 injured in the West Bank, mostly at protests against the massacre in Gaza<sup>7</sup>. As of 7 August, there are 450 Palestinians being held in administrative detention, without charge or access to trial. Around 268 of these were detained during the Israeli military's wide-reaching campaign of raids, detentions, and a blockade on the city of Hebron in mid-June. Hundreds of workers and students have been refused permission to leave the West Bank to return to their places of employment and universities, causing strain to families. Meanwhile, at least three new settler outposts have been established in the West Bank since July. While international attention is rightly focused on Gaza, Israel has used this as an opportunity to extend and intensify ongoing human rights violations against people in the West Bank.

In summary, PNGO calls for:

- The international community (including governments, the UN and INGOs) to pressure Israel to end its assault on Gaza, to lift the siege, open the borders to both the movement of people and goods, including materials required for recovery;
- The international community to hold Israel accountable for its continuous breaches of international law during its repeated attacks on Gaza, and its belligerent occupation of the Palestinian territories;
- International NGOs to join Palestinian civil society's 2005 call for a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel until it complies with international law and respects the legitimate right of Palestinians to a dignified existence underpinned by liberation and independence.

## **PNGO Network**

**14/8/2014**

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<sup>7</sup> UN OCHA, "Protection of Civilians Report", 22 July-4 August 2014, p 1.