

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Ligue Internationale de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté

Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad

Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO; Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO, and UNICEF.



3 March 2009

Dear Women,

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Emily Greene Balch
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International Secretariat:

1, rue de Varembe, C.P.28,
1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland
Tel: (+41 22) 919-7080
Fax: (+41 22) 919-7081
Email: inforequest@wilpf.ch

United Nations Office:

777 UN Plaza,
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel: (+1 212) 682-1265
Fax: (+1 212) 286-8211
Email: wilpfun@igc.org

www.wilpf.ch

www.ReachingCriticalWill.org
www.PeaceWomen.org

Greetings in this most troubling time, on the occasion of International Women's Day. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) approaches this day with an analysis of the root causes of war and injustice: the pursuit of profit, rather than the fulfillment of human need. We are horrified by the daily murder of innocent civilians in the Gaza strip as a result of the massive escalation in military action. This is illegal, uncivilized and unacceptable behaviour by a United Nations Member State. The situation in Gaza is desperate.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has been concerned with the question of Palestine since the early twenties and has worked toward a peaceful and just solution of the Arab/Israeli conflict since it began.

WILPF will continue its efforts to help achieve peace in the Middle East. Too many lives are being lost due to the illegal occupation of Iraq and Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in blatant violation of United Nations resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention. There is too much destruction of land and homes and families; too many children are being deprived of a future in their homeland, and too many resources are going to the military at the expense of economic and social development and co-operation among all people there.

The resulting instability and fear affects not only the people in the Middle East but people around the world. No other conflict has the potential to ignite a worldwide conflagration as has the conflict between Israel and the Arab world. The world community has a stake in finding a speedy resolution. The United Nations must at last assume responsibility for achieving a just peace between Israel and Palestine based on its own resolutions.

WILPF continues to issue statements, organizes demonstrations and public educations events and more to bring attention to this situation. Our most recent statement, issued 10 February 2009 after consultation with our members in Israel, Lebanon and Palestine is below.

We send you greetings of solidarity as you meet with this peaceful delegation.

Annelise Ebbe

Kerstin Greback

WILPF International Presidents

WILPF Statement - 10 February 2009

On 27 December 2009 Israel launched a military operation on the Gaza Strip, the most densely populated part of the Palestinian Territory under Israeli occupation since 1967. The operation was code-named Cast Lead and began with heavy bombardments of the Strip and its population, followed by a ground invasion. The stated immediate purpose was to destroy enough Hamas military installations in order to stop the shooting of missiles into Israel.

Statistics provided by the Palestinian Authority show that the operation resulted in the death of 1314 Palestinians, among them 412 children and 110 women, and wounded 5300 Palestinians including 1855 children and 795 women. Thirteen Israelis were also killed.

A very fragile cease-fire is now in place in Gaza and South Israel. While negotiations for a durable cease-fire agreement continue, there are reports of ongoing bombing by Israel of the border area with Egypt to prevent the reconstruction of tunnels, and of Hamas shooting rockets into South Israel.

The extent of the devastation in the Gaza Strip caused by the Israeli military operation is gradually becoming known and it is horrific. Calls by civil society organizations and movements to make Israel accountable for its actions and to pay for the rebuilding of the area are clear. Accusations of war crimes having been committed are increasing.

In an action appeal issued on 26 January 2009, Amnesty International states that its international delegates visiting Gaza "have found indisputable evidence of widespread use of the chemical white phosphorus against the Palestinian civilians in densely populated residential areas...". The indiscriminate use of white phosphorus is a war crime under international law.

Professor Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, in a statement issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 27 December 2008, stated that "The Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip represent severe and massive violations of international humanitarian law as defined in the Geneva Conventions, both in regard to the obligations of an Occupying Power and in the requirements of the laws of war."

Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations Secretary General, has demanded a full investigation into Israel's bombing of the UN Compound in Gaza.

The more than 18-months long blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip, keeping a million and a half Palestinians imprisoned in a small area had already produced a human catastrophe. How was it possible that the governments stood still while the sealed-in Gaza population was bombed and their land utterly devastated from the air and ground for more than 20 days? And what now? Humanitarian aid to the Gaza population must be provided fast and in massive quantities. Huge amounts of material and financial assistance must be provided in volumes to rebuild Gaza and its economy.

As the same time a political solution of the Israel/Palestine conflict must be forged before further human catastrophes are inflicted. There is no military solution to this or any other conflict. Violence only begets more violence. The road to a just lasting peace is through negotiation, including negotiations for disarmament. For peace to last it must be built on basic justice for all involved in the conflict, and on the willingness of all to achieve that goal. Negotiations must include all concerned parties, including Hamas. It is also necessary to engage civil society, especially women's organizations. In this regard, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom calls on all UN Member States, in particular the United States of America and the European Union Member States to change their policy and support such negotiations in full good faith.

Just Peace in Middle East can be brokered only by applying broad and inclusive perspective, firm demands and strong commitment from the international community. To build a sustainable peace it is not enough to talk with women and men from the civil society. Before it is too late, the international society should use flexible but uncompromisable diplomacy to bring at the negotiating table, together with the ruling political powers, these progressive forces: feminists, peace activists, intellectuals, thinkers and liberal politicians.

In this regard, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom calls on all UN Member States, in particular the United States of America and the European Union Member States to change their policy and support such negotiations in full good faith.

We urge the International Community to take steps:

- to end the occupation of all the lands occupied by Israel in 1967 and the dismantling of all Jewish settlements illegally constructed under international law as well as the dismantling of the separation wall built on Palestinian land ;
- to implement the relevant UN resolutions concerning the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people;
- to bring about the establishment of a viable, independent State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side with Israel;

In the immediate, we urge:

- the rapid opening of the Gaza border crossings and the lifting of the blockade;
- Israel to fulfill its responsibilities as the occupying power;
- rapid aid to rebuild the devastated infrastructure in Gaza – schools, hospitals, medical services, electric grid, water supply, etc. and medical supplies, medicines, food, school books and supplies;
- protection of the Israeli and Palestinian populations by UN peace keepers and not by NATO;

We call for:

- the establishment of a Middle East zone free of all weapons of mass destruction;
- And urge the USA and Israel to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

We further call for women to be included in every phase and level of activity in the work for peace as stated in UNSCR 1325.