

# Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

January 21, 2009

Dear President Obama,

With your historic inauguration as the 44th President of the United States, we share our sincerest congratulations and hope that you will uphold your commitment to change.

As American citizens we are deeply concerned that our nation's one-sided approach to the Middle East crisis compromises America's ability to act as a fair negotiator. Our foreign policy has upheld the interests of Israel, but has failed to do the same for the Palestinian people. Israel—the fourth largest military power in the world—has devastated a population of 1.5 million people, one without an army, navy, or air force. As the attacks in Gaza demonstrated, the outgoing administration chose to defend Israeli aggression even though the violence resulted in the disproportionate deaths of more than 1,300 Palestinians, including 300 children, as compared to 13 Israelis. Indeed, the loss of all of these lives cannot be justified.

As you embark upon your presidency, we offer your administration the following recommendations for an even-handed policy that ensures sustainable peace in the region:

#### **END THE LONGSTANDING BLOCKADE AND ALLOW HUMANITARIAN AID TO REACH GAZA.**

Since January 2006, Israel has blocked entry into Gaza, preventing delivery of food, medicine, fuel, and basic necessities. Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Vatican's Council for Justice and Peace, called on the world to, "Look at the conditions in Gaza: more and more, it resembles a big concentration camp." On December 30, 2008, the humanitarian relief boat "Dignity", carrying a former U.S. Congresswoman, was rammed and shot at by the Israeli navy and could not deliver its aid. On January 8, the International Committee of the Red Cross relief workers found four starving children sitting next to their mothers' dead bodies. The ICRC reported that, "The Israeli military must have been aware of the situation but did not assist the wounded. Neither did they make it possible for us or the Palestinian Red Crescent to assist the wounded."

#### **DEMAND THAT ISRAEL ADHERE TO INTERNATIONAL LAW.**

Israel is in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 242, which calls for Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Territories, and Resolution 446, which calls for Israel to remove and stop building all illegal settlements on Palestinian land. Israel must also abide by Resolution 1860, passed on January 8, which calls for an "immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza" and "the unimpeded provision throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance within Gaza, including food, fuel and medical treatment."

#### **CALL FOR A LASTING AND ENFORCEABLE CEASEFIRE RESPECTED BY ALL PARTIES.**

In June 2008, Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire, which, according to CNN, Israel broke by killing 6 Palestinians in Gaza on November 4, 2008. Hamas retaliated by firing rockets into Israel, and the carnage in Gaza was Israel's response. Israeli military veteran and professor of international relations, Avi Shlaim, has stated that Israel's "response to the pinpricks of rocket attacks was totally disproportionate." According to Amnesty International, hitting residential streets with shells that blast shrapnel over a wide area constituted "prima facie evidence of war crimes." While Israel and Hamas agreed separately to a ceasefire this weekend, it is not permanent nor does it include mutually agreed upon terms.

#### **REEVALUATE THE \$3 BILLION OF ANNUAL U.S. AID TO ISRAEL.**

The U.S. Arms Export Control Act mandates that American weapons not be used to attack civilian populations in offensive operations. However, American tax dollars have helped finance the attack on Gaza and paid for the guns, ammunition, and aircraft used to kill innocent Palestinians and collectively punish an entire population. Human Rights Watch recently reported that the Israeli military fired artillery shells with white phosphorous into the Jebaliya refugee camp, burning Palestinian civilians. On July 29, 2007, the U.S. agreed to continue military aid to Israel with a 25% increase, amounting to \$30 billion over the next ten years.

Congressman Dennis Kucinich recently stated, "Using U.S. planes, helicopters and munitions to attack a wounded, starved and thirsty civilian population of mostly children trapped in a box called Gaza has become acceptable, perhaps because we have already accepted the deaths of over one million innocent civilians in Iraq in a war based on lies. When we recognize the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, when we come to grips with the reality of suffering on both sides, we may yet find a way to save ourselves."

Mr. President, we respectfully urge you to consider our recommendations to rescue the people of Gaza from this humanitarian disaster. We also hope that during your Presidency you will strongly encourage Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Territories and return to pre-1967 borders, and that you will support the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. While we have always insisted that the Palestinians meet their obligations in seeking a resolution to this conflict, the time to insist on the same from Israel is long overdue.

Sincerely,

Muslim Public Affairs Council - New York ([www.mpac.org](http://www.mpac.org))  
 United for Peace and Justice ([www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org))  
 Council on American-Islamic Relations - New York ([www.cair.com](http://www.cair.com))  
 U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation ([www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org))  
 American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee ([www.adc.org](http://www.adc.org))  
 LA Jews For Peace ([www.lajewsforpeace.org](http://www.lajewsforpeace.org))

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