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For contact: end.gaza.siege@gmail.com

"END THE SIEGE"
The Palestinian-International Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza

November 2007

On 25 October, a Palestinian patient died at Erez crossing while awaiting being allowed to cross to Israeli hospital. A week ago, a woman died in Gaza hospital with her newly born baby, while awaiting permit to be transferred to Israel for medical treatment.

*These are not the first victims,
and will certainly not be the last should the current situation continue to prevail*

Last week, the operations rooms in Gaza's main hospital were shut down due to the lack of medical gases, which was not allowed by the Israelis. Today Israel does not allow except 12 basic items to enter Gaza, out of over 9,000 commodities. From soap to coffee, from water to soft drinks, from fuel to gas, from computers to spare parts, from cement to raw materials for industry, all and hundred other items are not allowed into Gaza today.

The Israeli cabinet declared Gaza as hostile entity, and has declared its intentions to further intensify the collective punishment by cutting the electricity power and fuel products. Banks in Israel are also threatening to cut off all financial cooperation with Palestinian banks in Gaza.

Given all this, we have adopted the initiative of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme to launch the Palestinian-International campaign for breaking the siege on Gaza, which has been intensified lately by the strict siege imposed on the Gaza Strip since June 2007.

The aim of this humanitarian, non-partisan campaign is to put pressure on the Israeli government in order to lift the siege imposed on the population of Gaza. By raising the awareness of the international community on the deteriorating living conditions resulting from the siege, we aim at mobilizing the efforts of the various international community organizations and governments to stop the boycott of Gaza. We call for the implementation of the recent European Parliament resolution calling on the Israeli government to end the siege.

It is important to declare that "End the Siege" is a non-partisan campaign, initiated and managed by representatives of the civil society, business community, intellectuals, academics, women activists, and advocates for human rights and peace from the West Bank and Gaza. We are all guided by our commitment to peace and our respect to human dignity.

We believe that it is a moral and ethical duty to rescue the lives of human souls living under bitter circumstances that sabotage their right to exist. People in Gaza are deprived of the simplest requirements for a decent life. We are determined to move hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder with all people who believe in freedom, human dignity and peace.

We need the support of all people who believe in justice all over the world, to contribute to the success of this campaign. We also call upon all Palestinians, whether in Gaza, West Bank, inside the green-line, or anywhere else in the Diaspora to support our efforts and join our activities. It is a genuine call to rescue people not governments or political parties. It is time to put aside any partisan conflicts and unite people in the pursuit of freedom, justice, and peace. We particularly call upon Jews whose history of trauma, discrimination and suffering should guide them to stand up today against the suffering of others.

Planned activities of the campaign:

The campaign is planned to take place from November 2007 until the siege is broken. We will hold a press conference to announce the launching of the campaign.

Media and information technology methods will be our main tools to lobby supporters and contributors from around the world.

The first major event of the campaign will be organizing an international symposium entitled “Breaking the Siege on Gaza: Together for a United Front for Peace” in Gaza.

The campaign will also include inviting friends from around the world for an on-going individual or group visits to Gaza. The visitors will have first hand information on the Palestinian life in order to disseminate such information in their own country. Visitors will be hosted in Palestinian homes in order to closely get acquainted with the Palestinian hardship realities and their living conditions. Media coverage of the activities in Gaza will be documented.

We will rely on our Israeli friends to host and help our friends from abroad who, if not allowed to enter Gaza, are expected to stage non-violent protests.

We will arrange for a peaceful march to Erez checkpoint from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the checkpoint. It will include peace activists from all over the world.

Throughout the campaign, solidarity meetings, cultural activities, and discussion will take place not only in Gaza, but in Tel Aviv, Ramallah, and different cities in the world.

The campaign will include a major event in May, which is the arrival of 120 human rights activists including Noble Prize winners to Gaza on a boat coming from Cyprus. This event will be titled “Free Gaza Movement Day” and is planned by the "Free Gaza" solidarity group in USA.

The campaign will have special posters as well as a website where all relevant materials will be published. The site will give opportunity for people to exchange information, ask questions, and have their comments.

Throughout the campaign, close contact with the media will be maintained with regular feeding of information and news update.

The Impacts of the Siege on Gaza:

The Gaza Strip has two main crossings that connect it to the whole world, i.e. Rafah in the south (To Egypt) and Erez in the north (to Israel) . There are three other crossings that are used to exchange goods and bring in food to the Gaza Strip; Today all are closed partially or completely.

Since the winning of Hamas in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in 2006, the Israeli government, with the support of the US administration, has imposed a siege on all the Palestinian occupied Territories, declared its boycott on the new Palestinian government, and refused to transfer customs revenues to the Palestinian government. After taking these measures, several donor countries including major donors like Europe have severely cut off their development assistance offered to the Palestinian people. The result of that form of collective punishment was a gradual deterioration of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

Following Hamas military take-over of Gaza strip in June 2007, the siege imposed by Israel was tightened to an unprecedented level. Citing the continuing home-made rockets from inside Gaza, the Israeli government has recently declared Gaza as a hostile entity and threatened to cut electrical power, fuel supply to Gaza and to substantially decrease the number of people allowed in and out; as well as, the amounts of goods and food supplies, and money needed for the daily life of people of Gaza.

The Israeli policy of unlawful collective punishment has always had its serious impact on the lives of the Palestinian civilians. Collective punishment is expressly forbidden under international humanitarian law. According to this principle, persons cannot be punished for offenses that they have not personally committed. In its authoritative commentary on Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the International Committee of the Red Cross has clarified that the prohibition on collective punishment does not just refer to criminal penalties, “but penalties of any kind inflicted on persons or entire groups of persons, in defiance of the most elementary principles of humanity, for acts that these persons have not committed.”

The siege that was imposed on the Gaza Strip has created excessive loss and damage in the different aspects of Palestinian life. The Gaza Strip has turned into a huge prison with no access to the outside world.

The health sector has been dramatically affected by the siege. According to the latest Humanitarian Situation Report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA) released on October 9th, 2007, fewer than five patients crossed into Israel/West Bank each day for medical treatment compared to an average of 40 patients per day in July . World Health Organization has indicated, though, that an average of 1000 patients used to leave Gaza for treatment each month prior to the mid-June closures.

As a result of the continuous closures, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has reported significant increases in the costs of some food items. The price of 1 KG of fresh meat has increased from NIS 32 to NIS 40 (20%) while the price of chicken rose from NIS 8 to NIS 12 (33%). According to OCHA's report of October, 9th, during the month of September, a total of 1,508 truckloads of goods crossed into Gaza. This compares to 2,468 truckloads in the month of August and 3,190 in July. There are no food stocks anymore and that contributes to the rising of prices.

The educational system in Gaza has also been affected by the siege. With the start of the new school year, there has been a serious lack of books and a shortage of the raw materials needed for printing. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), one third of the students started the school year without the needed text books. The closures also deprived thousands of students from reaching their universities outside the Gaza Strip. Thousands of students are not allowed to join their universities in the West Bank or abroad due to the siege.

On the industrial level, preventing the import of raw materials essential for Gaza businesses and industry, and the export of final goods, resulted in the shut down of many manufacturing businesses. According to Paltrade's assessment on 12 September 2007, over 75,000 private sector employees (around 60% of the total private sector workforce) have been laid off in the latest three months, bearing in mind that private sector employees represent around 36% of the total work force in Gaza. According to the Palestinian Private Sector Coordination Council (PSCC), the current restrictions have led to the suspension of 90% of Gaza's industrial operations.

The agricultural sector is also at risk. According to OCHA's report, the export season for Gaza's cash crops (strawberries, carnation flowers and cherry tomatoes) is expected to begin in mid-November. This year, 2,500 dunums of strawberries have been planted with an expected production of approximately 6,250 tons of strawberries including 2,500 destined for European markets. 490 tons of cherry tomatoes are also expected to be produced. If exports are not allowed by this time, farmers will be exposed to tremendous losses in terms of production cost and potential sales.

According to the World Bank, 67% of the Gaza population live under poverty line which is estimated by World bank to be \$2.per day. Since human beings are the products of the environment in which they live, the Palestinian environment today is a combination of deprivation, poverty, anger, feelings of powerlessness and despair. Such feelings will inevitably lead to simmering anger which will eventually brew into more violence and defiance.

Palestinians have gone through repeated traumas of death and destruction of home and life over the past few decades. The current siege provokes the previous traumas making people re-experience the negative feelings that they have previously encountered and passed through.

It is only to be expected that in such an environment extremist ideologies will flourish. This will impact on the Palestinian society internally as well as the political environment in the whole region, destroying the possibilities of peace and security.

Putting all in a nutshell, with this immoral siege, Gaza is meant to be the city of death where everything is destroyed. It is our duty to rescue life.

Who Are We

Dr. Eyad Sarraj, President, Board of Directors of the American International School in Gaza

Mr. Abdel Karim Ashour, Director, Agricultural Development Association

Mr. Hashem Shawwa, President, Administrative Council, Bank of Palestine

Mr. Ma'moun Abu Shahla, Vice-President, Administrative Council, Bank of Palestine

Mr. Issam Younis, Director, Al Mizan Center for Human Rights

Mr. Constantine Dabbagh, Executive Secretary, Near East Council of Churches

Mr. Mohsen Abu Ramadan, Director, Arab Center for Agricultural Development

Dr. Jawad Wadi, President, Al Azhar University

Dr. Kamalein Shaath, President, Islamic University

Mr. Raji Sourani, Director, Palestinian Center for Human Rights

Mr. Khaled Abdelshafi, Director, UNDP

Mr. Jawdat Khoudari, Businessman, Businessmen Association

Dr. Riyad Za'noun, President of Gaza Community Mental Health Programme

Dr. Ali Abu Zuhri, President, Al Aqsa University

Ms. Rania Kharma, Principal Coordinator

Mr. Nader Shurafa, Administrative Director, Ramattan Media Agency

Mr. Omar Shaban, President, PalThink for Strategic Studies

Dr. Fawaz Abu Sitta, Lecturer, Al Azhar University

Mr. Sami Abdel Shafi, Director, Emergeconsultants

Mr. Tala Okal, Writer and Political Analyst

Me. Mustafa Mas'oud, External Affairs Officer, Businessmen Association

Ms. Nebras Bseiso, Director, Palestinian Banking Association in Gaza Strip

Ms. Hanan Taha, Director, PalTrade

Mr. Ibrahim Khashan

Ms. Mona El Farra

Dr. Mamdouh Aker, Commissioner General, Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights - PICCR

Mr. Hasib Nashashibi, Ensan Center, Jerusalem

Dr. Laila Atshan, Psychosocial Consultant

Mr. Hani Masri, Director General, Badael Center for Media and Research

Dr. Jumana Odeh, Director of Palestinian Happy Child Center, Ramallah