



MEDIA RELEASE

Statement of solidarity with the People and Government of Israel and support for a Palestinian state

The Jewish community of Australia declares its solidarity with the People and Government of Israel in the present conflict with Hamas.

The persistent, intentional targeting of Israeli citizens by rockets fired from the Hamas-controlled Gaza strip is a war crime and an act of violence and terror no other country would tolerate for its own citizens. Almost one million Israelis currently live within range of these rockets (which are financed by Iran, smuggled in from Egypt, and have warheads loaded with shrapnel to cause maximum injury to human beings). And this in the context of Hamas' openly declared ultimate objective to destroy Israel and kill or drive out its Jewish population.

Like any other country facing such an onslaught, Israel has full right under the UN Charter to use force to defend and protect its citizens against this continuing aggression, as has been recognised by the leaders of all responsible nations.

Israel's response is also proportional to the threat to its citizens. In international law, proportionality is not measured by comparing the number of casualties on each side or the extent of the force used by each side. Israel is entitled to use such force as is necessary to repel the source of the aggression against its people and territory and to prevent the aggression from recurring.

Hamas must accept that their rocket attacks on Israel must end. It is refreshing to note the condemnation of Hamas by leaders in the Arab world and elsewhere.

The thousands of rockets that have been fired by Hamas would have caused even more deaths and injuries were it not for the fact that Israel, unlike Hamas, values the lives of its citizens and protects them by emergency warning systems and shelters.

Hamas on the other hand uses civilians in Gaza as human shields and locates weapons and military infrastructure in their midst, deliberately using private homes, mosques, business premises, universities and other buildings and facilities, even hospitals, as cover.

Hamas continues its illegal smuggling of weapons, munitions and fighters into Gaza through tunnels, in the cynical knowledge that Israel's counter-measures will necessarily involve the imposition of restrictions into and out of Gaza, which Hamas uses to stoke the conflict.

Although Israel, unlike Hamas, selects only military targets, and gives warnings to civilians in conflict areas, it is inevitable given Hamas's use of its own population as human shields that Israel's attacks on military targets will cause civilian deaths and injuries. The proportion of civilian as opposed to other casualties acknowledged by Hamas and the UN is less than one-third. This demonstrates that civilians are not being deliberately targeted by Israel. If Israel were attacking indiscriminately, as Hamas does, thousands of civilians would have been killed or injured.

Every civilian casualty is nonetheless a true tragedy. We feel as much sadness at the loss of an innocent Palestinian father, mother or child as we do for the loss of Israeli lives.

We also empathise with the legitimate desire of Palestinians for self-determination and we support, as do most Israelis, the establishment of an independent, viable and democratic Palestinian state, alongside a secure Israel with defensible borders.

We pray that the Palestinians will support leaders who are committed to achieving that outcome and for the day when Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in dignity and peace.

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