

ADDRESS TO SOLIDARITY RALLY - 11 January 2009

Tonight I stand before you as a proud Australian Jew to declare that the Jewish community of Australia expresses its solidarity with the People and Government of Israel in the present conflict with Hamas.

I also stand before you as a proud Australian Jew to express the Jewish community's pride in and deep appreciation for, the balanced and principled statements made by the Australian Government, in the aftermath of the breakdown of the truce; including Hamas' official announcement that it would not under any circumstances renew the truce; the resumption by Hamas of rocket and mortar attacks on Israel's citizens; and the action taken in those circumstances against Hamas' terrorist infrastructure, by Israel.

In my letter to the Hon Julia Gillard the Acting Prime Minister on 2 January 2009, I said:
"We acknowledge the Government's continuing understanding of Israel's position and its need to act in the defence of its citizens, who have been subject to renewed, unrelenting and murderous rocket attacks and mortar fire across southern Israel.

We also acknowledge with gratitude on behalf of the Australian Jewish community, your Government's enduring friendship towards Israel and commitment to a lasting peace in the region."

I record also the apologies of the Hon Malcolm Turnbull Leader of the Opposition who supports this gathering.

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.

Hamas' Jihadist openly declared objective in its own right and on behalf of its sponsor Iran, is to destroy Israel, kill or drive out its Jewish population and create a radical Islamic dictatorship governed by Sharia law as a prelude to the coming of the Caliphate.

Israel will not allow it to succeed

Nearly 800 people have died in Gaza, 20% of them non combatants. This is a tragedy rightly to be deplored. We feel as much sadness at the loss of an innocent Palestinian as we do for the loss of Israeli lives.

But that loss must be seen in context.

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 has no incentive whatsoever to target civilians or to breach the accepted rules of war.

Israel's response is 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.

Regrettably there is no magic formula for battling evil without harming the innocent. Even though no nation has discovered it, Israel is the one condemned.

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 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' use of civilians in Gaza as human shields is well documented. Hamas legislator Fathi Hamad recently boasted on Al-Aksa TV:

"Palestinians formed human shields of women, children, the elderly and the mujahedeen in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine. It was as if they were saying to the Zionist enemy: We desire death like you desire life."

Friends, that is a war crime!

Further, Hamas locates weapons and military infrastructure in their midst, deliberately using private homes, business premises, universities, and other buildings and facilities, even hospitals and mosques, as cover. That is also a war crime!

On 1 January, 2009, the Canadian Muslim Congress said this about Hamas and its use of Palestinians as "human bait" in Gaza:

"No other national liberation movement in modern history has offered martyrdom as a substitute for freedom and statehood. Hamas has set back the clock for the Palestinians and it is time for the Palestinians and it is time for all Palestinians to recognize that Hamas offers only death, destruction and a place in Paradise not a Palestinian state"

Amongst the welter of condemnation of Israel's "disproportionate" or "excessive" response, there has been a notable absence of any suggestions as to what Israel should have done to discharge its obligation to protect and defend its citizens from Hamas' attacks.

We know that the much criticized but entirely justified security barrier on the West Bank has effectively stopped suicide murderers from entering Israel. But there is no security barrier capable of stopping Hamas' rockets. They must be eliminated at source.

And Israel has done so to protect its citizens, its very existence and as a bulwark for the west, notwithstanding the criticism, the condemnation, the hypocrisy and the hand wringing.

If world opinion were enough - there would be no Israel.

If Israel put its faith in some sections of the international community and the UN - there would be no Israel.

If Israel laid down its arms - there would be no Israel

If Hamas and Hizbollah laid down their arms - there would be peace.

We stand united in our support for Israel.

We empathise with the legitimate desire of Palestinians for self-determination in the context of 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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