

Executive Council of Australian Jewry Inc.

הוועד הפועל של
יהודי אוסטרליה

The Representative
Organisation of
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8 June 2010

Glenine Hamlyn
General Secretary
Queensland Churches Together
email: gensec@qct.org.au

Dear Glenine

Re: Queensland Churches Together Statement on the Gaza Flotilla Incident

Many people in our community have contacted our organisation to express their sadness and dismay at the public Statement issued by Queensland Churches Together on 4 June 2010.

People in our organisation and in the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies would have much preferred to discuss these matters with you directly before you issued any public statement.

In the circumstances, we have reluctantly concluded that we have no alternative but to respond to your statement publicly and a copy of our response is attached.

As far as we are concerned, the doors of direct communication between your organisation and ours remain wide open and we trust that the good relationship that has existed between our communities in Queensland and beyond will not be affected by our different views on this issue.

Yours sincerely

Robert M Goot AM SC
President

**RESPONSE OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN JEWRY AND QUEENSLAND
JEWISH BOARD OF DEPUTIES TO THE STATEMENT OF QUEENSLAND CHURCHES
TOGETHER MADE ON 4 JUNE 2010**

8 June 2010

We deplore the statement issued on 4 June 2010 by Queensland Churches Together (QCT) in connection with the Gaza flotilla incident

All loss of human life is distressing. To pre-judge who is responsible for that loss before all the facts are known, as the QCT has done, is appalling. Whilst the purpose of the QCT statement is ostensibly to call for an "independent" enquiry into the incident, the statement lacks credibility because of its one-sidedness.

The statement deplores "violence ...by Israeli elite forces" against "activists", but is hypocritically silent about the video evidence of a mob of those same "activists" attacking Israeli forces with knives, clubs, bars, concussion grenades and firearms. In the video, Israeli soldiers are seen being clubbed, stabbed, and in one instance thrown off the deck. There is no evidence of any use of live ammunition by any Israelis until after they were attacked and their lives were at stake.

Israeli soldiers suffered serious wounds, including gunshot and stab wounds and at least one soldier, who was flung from an upper deck some 30 feet to a lower deck, suffered a severe concussion. At least one soldier jumped overboard to save his life. Those attacking the Israeli soldiers were not non-violent peace "activists" and should not be permitted to hide behind that description.

Nor does the statement acknowledge that violence occurred on only one of the six ships in the flotilla. This was the ship under the control of the so-called Foundation for Human Rights, Liberties, and Humanitarian Relief organization (IHH), which has known links to al Qaeda, Hamas and other terrorist groups. On the other five ships, there was no violence by the protesters, no firearms were discharged and no-one was killed or wounded.

The most disgraceful aspect of the QCT statement is its completely unsubstantiated claim that "any investigation instigated by Israel could not fulfil the condition of impartiality". This is a slur directed not only at the Israeli government but also against Israel's independent judiciary. Israel has shown a far greater willingness and ability to conduct independent judicial inquiries into military and security matters than many other democratic countries. Israel conducted the *Agranat Inquiry* into the 1973 war with Egypt and Syria, the *Kahane Inquiry* into the 1982 Lebanon war and the *Winograd Commission* following the 2006 Lebanon war, each of which had far-reaching adverse political consequences for the government of the day.

We commend the Australian government's call for an independent inquiry to be conducted by Israel. Israel has its own internationally-recognized legal experts in the relevant fields of law, including retired Supreme Court presidents Aharon Barak and Meir Shamgar and international law professors Yoram Dinstein and Ruth Lapidoth. The QCT statement implies that widely respected Israeli legal figures such as these have no integrity and could not be trusted to be impartial, an appalling defamation.

In the wake of the *Goldstone Committee Report*, whose conclusions were pre-determined and incorporated into the Committee's terms of reference by the UN Human Rights Council before its inquiry even commenced, the United Nations has forfeited all moral authority with regard to Israel. Neither the UN nor any of its agencies are fit and proper forums for conducting any kind of impartial investigation with regard to Israel.

The QCT falsely claims that there is a "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza. In one week in mid-May, 637 truckloads, consisting of 14,069 tons of food, medical supplies and humanitarian aid arrived in Gaza via Israel. In addition, 781 medical patients and accompanying individuals from the Gaza Strip crossed into Israel to receive treatment in various hospitals and 191 staff members of international organizations crossed into the Gaza Strip, and 202 crossed back from Gaza. This was a typical week.

It is the height of irresponsibility for the QCT to call for the end of the blockade of Gaza without calling for the adoption of a credible system to monitor what goes into Gaza and to verify that all aid will be used for the benefit of Palestinian civilians rather than being diverted by Hamas for its own uses, as has occurred in the past. What the QCT is advocating would simply lead to the rearmament of Hamas and other groups dedicated to the pursuit of Israel's violent destruction, a renewal of rocket attacks against civilian population centres in Israel and another round of blood-shed.

This flotilla tragedy emphasizes again the need for new momentum in the peace process leading to an end of the conflict. It is shameful that the QCT statement contains not a word about the urgency of this need or about the inhuman decision of Hamas to deny any Red Cross or other access to Gilad Shalit.



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