



## **ECAJ welcomes ceasefire in Gaza**

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The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (the ECAJ), the peak representative body of the Australian Jewish community, has welcomed the ceasefire in Gaza that has come into effect after 3 days of fighting between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

PIJ was established in Gaza in 1981 with the avowed aim of the annihilating the State of Israel by force and imposing Islamic religious law. It has a long record of firing rockets aimed at civilian targets in Israel, and using Palestinian civilians and civilian buildings and neighbourhoods in Gaza as cover for launching its attacks. PIJ is listed as a terrorist organisation by Australia and numerous other countries.

The recent fighting began when Israel discovered that PIJ was about to initiate yet another round of attacks against Israeli civilians, a charge that PIJ has not denied.

“Under international law, Israel has the right and duty to defend its citizens and territory against armed attacks, and this includes the right to take pre-emptive action against an imminent attack”, said ECAJ Co-CEO Peter Wertheim. “It was gratifying to note that Australia’s ambassador to Israel, Paul Griffiths, publicly confirmed that ‘Australia respects Israel’s right to defend itself’.”

“In stark contrast to PIJ’s tactics of attacking civilians indiscriminately, Israel’s response was both necessary and proportionate, being directed specifically at PIJ targets, including two PIJ commanders who were killed”, Wertheim noted. “ Hamas did not join with PIJ on this occasion and consequently Israel did not take action against Hamas. Inevitably there were also civilian casualties, some of them caused by misfired PIJ rockets which fell short of their targets in Israel and landed in Gaza instead. Every civilian victim is a tragedy and is to be regretted. The responsibility lies squarely with PIJ.”

Wertheim also called for political pressure to be placed on Palestinian leaders to abandon their eliminationist attitudes towards Israel once and for all.

“Instead of the ceasefire being a mere interlude until the next round of fighting, it is well past time for all Palestinian organisations to fundamentally alter their attitude and approach to Israel”, he said.

“Instead of envisaging Israel as an historical aberration that is illegitimate and destined to disappear, Palestinian leaders need to wake up to the reality that the Jewish people have deep roots in the land, and that Israel is here to stay. In short,

they need to start acting like leaders, instead of continuing to submit to the most extreme and bigoted elements among them.”

**Contact:**

**Peter Wertheim AM | co-Chief Executive Officer**

**phone: 02 8353 8500 | m: 0408 160 904 | fax 02 9361 5888**

**e: [pwertheim@ecaj.org.au](mailto:pwertheim@ecaj.org.au) | [www.ecaj.org.au](http://www.ecaj.org.au)**