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Israeli and American Jews Speak Out Against Horrors in Gaza



Image by Kim Silverstein. Courtesy JVP.

In the midst of Netanyahu's annihilation of innocent Palestinian civilians in Gaza, many of them children, women and the elderly, there is a rising urgency from many Israeli and domestic Jewish groups for an immediate ceasefire and greatly increasing the flow of humanitarian aid.

In the U.S. Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now have vigorously engaged in public non-violent civil disobedience – an American tradition – to challenge the inhumane unconditional co-belligerency by Congress and Joe Biden of the present extremist

regime's genocidal destruction of Palestinians. Many U.S. Jewish Americans are standing tall either individually or in groups to exclaim "not in our name" to the U.S.-funded civilian slaughter in Gaza.

A most remarkable, little-noticed open letter to President Joe Biden appeared in December 13, 2023, New York Times, paid for by the legendary Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem and signed by 16 other Israeli peace, human rights, veterans and religious associations. (See the letter here).

Titled "The Humanitarian Catastrophe in the Gaza Strip," the letter condemns the Hamas "horrific and criminal attack on Israeli civilians" and demands the release of the Israelis in Gaza. What follows are excerpts from their message to the White House:

"Since the war began, Israel's policy has driven the humanitarian crisis in Gaza to the point of catastrophe – not only as an inevitable outcome of war. As part of this policy, soon after the fighting began, Israel stopped selling Gaza electricity and water, closed its crossings and blocked all entry of food, water, fuel and medicine."

Citing international law and committed war crimes, the signers continue:

"UN agencies and humanitarian organizations report that the situation in Gaza is catastrophic and they have almost no way left to help the population. The few truckloads that are allowed in – a drop in the ocean, according to the reports – cannot be distributed due to the ongoing bombardments, the destruction of infrastructure and restrictions imposed by Israel. This leaves more than two million people hungry and thirsty, without access to proper medical care, and with infectious diseases spreading due to unhygienic overcrowding and lack of water. This inconceivable reality grows worse by the day."

"You [Biden] have the power to influence our government to change its policy and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, in accordance with Israel's legal obligations"

"We are in the final throes of an emergency. Many deaths can still be prevented. Israel must change its policy now."

The estimated death toll in Gaza at "more than 18,000" is a gross undercount. Well over ten times more children in Gaza have been killed in nine weeks than the number of children lost in the Russian war on Ukraine over nearly 22 months. In addition to the unprecedented intense bombing, large numbers of Palestinian infants, children, women, the infirmed, and disabled are homeless, facing the elements, dying by the minute from the homicidal conditions described by these Israeli human rights groups, journalists, and recorded by U.S. drones above Gaza.

Being reduced to rubble, Gaza has no fire trucks or water to put out spreading fires. The Israeli military has destroyed or rendered the vast majority of hospitals and health clinics inoperative. UN relief agencies are shelled and have seen over 130 of their staff slain.

The Israeli war machine has also taken the lives of over 60 Palestinian journalists (many with their families), including three Israeli reporters. Consistent with its long-time exclusion of outside journalists, the Israeli government doesn't want the world to see and hear from unembedded, mainstream Israeli or foreign journalists.

Day after deadly day, President Biden, Secretary of State Blinken and Secretary of Defense Austin used words to urge minimizing Palestinian casualties while they deploy deeds of massive shipments of bombs, missiles and UN vetoes. Small wonder our government officials are having little restraining influence. The Israeli Air Force even bombs and contaminates the small agricultural areas destroying olive groves and fields growing grain, vegetable and fruit crops. It is even against Israeli law for Palestinians to collect rainwater which is decreed to be the property of the state.

Pope Francis, long a protector of Jewish rights when he was a cleric in Argentina, called Israeli President Isaac Herzog to express his deep concern about the plight of the Palestinians, saying that "it is forbidden to respond to terror with terror." The Vatican reported that the Holy Father is in constant touch with the "Christian Church" in Gaza and the West Bank. For decades, Christians in the West Bank have been harassed, discriminated against and encroached upon (e.g., Bethlehem) with little media coverage, except for the courageous Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

Oblivious to world opinion, including that of our allies, Biden and the Democrats are pushing for another \$14.3 billion in U.S. taxpayer monies to further annihilate the defenseless, now homeless, human beings in Gaza, screaming in pain and fear, sick, starving and dying, unable to bury their kin. Rotting corpses are piling up, and being eaten by stray dogs.

Meanwhile, people in the U.S. who speak out for stopping this brutality are charged with being "antisemitic" – a grotesque cheapening and misuse of a word that was used to describe the savage Russian pogroms and Nazi horrors of extermination. Silencing peaceful criticism with this slander is a conscious tactic. Note the statement by Shulamit Aloni, a former Minister of Education and winner of the Israel Prize:

"It's a trick. We always use it. When from Europe, somebody criticizes Israel, we bring up the Holocaust. When, in the United States, people are critical of Israel, then they are anti-Semitic."

It works all too often. Americans are smeared, being suspended or losing their jobs, their careers, and their customers because they oppose the carnage in Gaza. It is a sign of the partisan censorship that incurring such penalties is not experienced by Americans exclaiming their full support for this genocidal obliteration of Gaza – a multiple war crime pointed out by both Jewish and non-Jewish international law scholars here and abroad.

The least that humane citizens can do is to tell their members of Congress to demand a permanent ceasefire, the release of the Israeli hostages and the large number of Palestinian prisoners (children, women and men) in Israeli jails without charges or due process, and serious movement toward a two-state solution.

The switchboard in Congress is 202-224-3121.

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