



Barriers to Peace between Israel and Palestine

December 2010

Widespread human rights violations by the Israeli authorities and security forces continue to act as barriers to finding any meaningful and lasting peace. These actions can motivate terrorist acts by individual Palestinians, which in turn justify the on-going human rights violations in the minds of Israeli police and soldiers. The Australian Government currently does not take up individual cases of human rights violations with the Israeli authorities. This contrasts action taken by the Australian Government with regards to similar cases in many other countries.

Israeli blockade of materials to provide clean water in Gaza

The UN Environment Programme has warned that 95% of water pumped in the Gaza strip is polluted and unfit for drinking. They estimate it will take at least 20 years to rehabilitate Gaza's underground water system. Since it began its siege on the Gaza Strip, in June 2007, Israel has forbidden the entry of equipment and materials needed to rehabilitate the water and sewerage treatment systems there. The prohibition has remained despite the recent easing of the siege.

Parts of the water system and sewerage treatment systems were bombed by Israeli forces during the war in Gaza in early 2009.

The daily per capita water consumption in the Gaza Strip is 91 litres, slightly higher than in the West Bank, where the figure is 73 litres. This is still lower than the minimum of 100 litres recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). By comparison, daily per capita water consumption in Israel is 242 litres in urban areas and 211 litres in rural areas.

An examination of a number of wells in Gaza by the UN Environment Programme found the concentration of nitrates was six times higher than the 50 mg level recommended by the WHO. The high level of nitrates is liable to cause anemia among children and methemoglobinemia ("blue infants" syndrome) among infants, which is liable to lead to choking and death. A study published in 2007, in which a sample of 340 infants from Gaza were examined, found almost half of them suffered from troubling symptoms of the syndrome.

According to international aid organisations, 20% of Gazan families have at least one child under the age of five who suffers from diarrhoea as a result of polluted water. A UN study in 2009 estimates diarrhoea is the cause of 12% of children's deaths in Gaza. The lack of potable drinking water is liable to cause malnutrition in children and affect their physical and cognitive development. The water pollution has also harmed agricultural production.

Equipment prohibited for entry into Gaza by the Israeli Government includes water pumps, pipes, generators, building cement and chlorine. The Israeli Government classifies all these materials as dual-use items that are liable to be used for military purposes, even where their use will be supervised by international organisations.

On-going destruction of Palestinian homes

Amnesty International reported that on 19 July 2010, Israeli authorities destroyed 26 Palestinian family homes in the al-Farisiya area of the Jordan Valley in the West Bank. The homes housed 107 people, including 52 children. Agricultural buildings supporting the villagers' livelihood were also demolished. Many of the families, who lived in the area since the 1970s, also lost many of their personal belongings and agricultural equipment.

Amnesty International has expressed concern that the demolitions are part of an Israeli Government strategy to remove the Palestinian population from the area of the West Bank known as "Area C", over which Israel has complete control in terms of planning and construction. The

estimated 150,000 Palestinians living there lack representation at all levels of the Israeli military planning system. Not only are there no Palestinian representatives in the planning institutions, but even the ability of Palestinian residents to submit objections to eviction and demolition is very limited. Most of the Jordan Valley area of the occupied West Bank has been declared a "closed military zone" by the Israeli army or has been taken over by some 36 Israeli settlements. In a "closed military zone" there is effectively no possibility for Palestinian construction and development.

Between January and July 2010, at least 198 Palestinian homes and buildings in the West Bank were demolished by Israeli forces, resulting in the forced displacement of almost 300 Palestinians, around half of them children.

What you can do:

Please write polite and respectful letters to (a letter to Israel will cost \$2.20):

Shimon Peres
President of the State of Israel
The Office of the President
3 Hanassi Street
Jerusalem 92188
ISRAEL

Ehud Barak
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Hakiryia, Tel Aviv 61909
Israel

Salutation: Dear President

E-mail: minister@mod.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Minister

His Excellency Mr Yuval ROTEM
Ambassador
Embassy of Israel
6 Turrana Street
Yarralumla, ACT, 2600
E-mail: info@canberra.mfa.gov.il
Salutation: Your Excellency

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep concern that the Israeli Government is blocking the entry of items essential to repairing and maintaining clean water supplies and sewerage treatment facilities in Gaza.
- Note that this is leading to death and disease amongst Palestinian infants and children.
- Ask that the Israeli Government immediately allow the entry of materials and equipment needed to rehabilitate and develop clean water supplies and sewerage treatment facilities.
- Ask that the Israeli Government ensure there is fair and equal distribution of water resources shared by Israelis and Palestinians.
- Express deep concern at the destruction of 26 family homes in the al-Farisiya area in the West Bank on 19 July.
- Urge that all further pending demolition and eviction orders against Palestinians in the Jordan Valley be immediately rescinded.
- Call on the authorities to place a moratorium on house demolitions and forced evictions in the West Bank until the law is amended to bring it into line with international standards.
- Call for responsibility for planning and building regulations in the Jordan Valley to be placed solely with the local Palestinian civilian authorities.

You can also write to the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and request the Australian Government take up these points with the Israeli Government. Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon. Kevin Rudd
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600
Salutation: Dear Minister

Acknowledgement: The Justice and International Mission Unit is grateful to B'Tselem and Amnesty International for the information contained within this action.