

International Conference Siege and Mental Health - Walls vs. Bridges

October 28th, 2008

We, Palestinians, Israelis and internationals from several continents, have spent months of preparation studying the harsh living conditions of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. We have listened to the people of Gaza, although most of us have been prevented by the Israeli government from seeing first hand the impact of the siege on the economic and social fabric of life.

We unreservedly condemn the ongoing and escalating injustices taking place in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

- The siege targets innocent civilians, and this is unethical, and immoral.
- The siege violates the principles of international law and human rights law.
- The siege has a devastating impact on the physical and mental health of the population.
- The siege fires anger and increases resentment against Israel, and against the international community, which seems to stand silently complicit. This sets the stage for new waves of violence instead of the peace that all Gazans dream of.
- The siege confirms that the Israeli occupation is more intense than ever.
- The siege touches every facet of life, including health, education, environment, economy, development, and impacts particularly on the next Palestinian generation.
- Israeli occupation measures, especially the siege, divide the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, just as roadblocks within the West Bank divide families and communities from each other, from the land they till, and the work they seek.

We, the undersigned conference participants, demand that the Israeli Government:

1. Immediately end the siege of the Gaza Strip.
2. Allow freedom of movement for individuals and goods.
3. Work genuinely to end the conflict and reach a just peace according to UN resolutions and past agreements made and broken.
4. Reach a just solution for the Palestinian refugees.

We call on the Israeli people, peace and human rights groups to:

Intensify efforts to articulate opposition to the siege, and commit to support international law and seek peace. The siege will hurt Israelis as well in the long run.

We call on mental health professionals worldwide:

To speak out for an end to the occupation and the siege; and to explain their psychological impact on the Palestinian population.

We urge International Bodies, such as the Quartet, the UN, and the EU, to accept their responsibilities in protecting Palestinian human rights and security; and pressure Israel to end its military occupation of Palestinian land, including its control of the Gaza Strip's borders, airspace and coastal water; the dismantling of settlements on the West Bank; the removal of the illegal Apartheid Wall and the removal of

roadblocks and checkpoints.

We, especially internationals who have a big role to play in pressuring their governments to take action in support of international law, commit ourselves to:

1. Present information about siege conditions in the Gaza Strip to our professional bodies and through our local media.
2. Contact our government officials and pressure them to act to end the siege.
3. Initiate a discussion within our various institutions -- professional associations, universities, religious bodies and other groups -- about the appropriateness and feasibility of using the strategy of "boycott, divestment and sanctions" to pressure Israel to end the siege of Gaza, and its occupation of Palestinian land, and to conform with international law.

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