

lawyers for palestinian
human rights



Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

VERY URGENT

Saturday 27 December 2008

Dear Mr Miliband,

I am writing to you to urge you to immediately call on Israel to cease all its attacks on Gaza.

I am horrified to learn that over 200 people have reportedly been killed in Gaza in the last few hours, many of them entirely innocent civilians, a significant number believed to be schoolchildren returning home from morning lessons.

I refer to the letter that I wrote to you four days ago (attached), in the wake of news reports that Israel was 'softening up' the international community for a full scale assault on Gaza. Those reports were followed, inter alia, by Tzip Livni's trip to Cairo to meet with President Mubarek, presumably to seek his complicity in today's terrible events.

As Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights and many other observers feared, Israeli rhetoric of avoiding civilian loss of life is not rooted in a proper application of the legal principles of proportionality and distinction. Today's events are not proportionate acts of self-defence.

I do not believe that Israel has made a lawful case for the wholesale targeting of Hamas. I believe from news reports that one target struck today was a graduation ceremony of police officers employed by the Hamas government – what evidence is there of any connection between rockets fired by militants, whether under the direction of Hamas or otherwise, and these trainee police officers?

But in any event, striking populated areas with the kind of force used by Israel today, even if some of the targets were in principle legitimate military targets, can never be in compliance with an ordinary understanding of the laws of war. Israel's acts are therefore war crimes and crimes against humanity and everything possible will be done within the law to bring all those concerned to justice, including any third parties against whom there is evidence that they have aided and abetted these crimes.

Many more civilians will be killed if Israel does not cease its attacks immediately.

I urge you to immediately contact other foreign ministers to arrange an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution requiring an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and calling on the international community to collect evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The response of the international community in urging Israel to minimise civilian casualties is entirely unacceptable when many innocent civilians, including children, have been killed in the past few hours. Israel must be pushed to immediately cease all its attacks.

The international community must accept that it has a moral and arguably a legal imperative to bring an end to the violence unfolding in Gaza.

Yours sincerely,

lawyers for palestinian
human rights



Daniel Machover
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights