

Statement of the European Coordination of Committees for Palestine: the EU must prevent a new massacre in Gaza

The European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine urges the EU to intervene with the Israeli authorities to immediately end Operation "Pillar of Defence", launched on Wednesday afternoon.

Operation "Pillar of Defence" must be seen within the broader context of the de-facto occupation and the on-going illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip which amounts to a form of economic and political warfare, and the deep-seated inherent asymmetry between Israel and the Palestinian population in Gaza.

Contrary to Israeli claims, the escalation of violence did not start with anti-tank missile being fired by the Palestinians at an Israeli jeep patrol on November 10. OCHA, in its Protection of Civilians Weekly Report (31.10-6.11 2012), reports that *"on 4 November, Israeli forces stationed in an observatory tower shot and killed a 23 year old mentally-challenged Palestinian... It was not until two hours later, following coordination with the Israeli military, that a Palestinian ambulance was permitted to reach the area"*. In its latest report, the information provided by OCHA confirms that the truce brokered by the Egyptians was violated by Israel: *"on 8 November, Israeli forces conducting an incursion into Gaza, to the east of Khan Younis, opened fire towards an open area, killing a 13 year-old boy. Initial accounts by human rights organizations indicate that the boy was playing near his house, although the reason for the shooting remains unclear. Later that day, in the same area, one Israeli soldier was injured by a Palestinian mortar shell fired at Israeli forces patrolling along the perimeter fence"*.

Since then, Israel has been using disproportionate force through aerial drone attacks and naval strikes on the Gaza Strip which is a tiny densely-populated area where there is no safe space and no bomb shelters. So-called "surgical attacks" are impossible and can only lead to the death of innocent civilians, as it has been the case during operation Cast Lead in 2008-9. The outcome of Israeli military actions is foreseeable: first and foremost, Palestinian civilians will be hit, many of which will be children and teenagers as 54% the population of Gaza is under the age of 18, vital infrastructures will be destroyed and the humanitarian crisis will be aggravated. The EU and its member states must intervene to prevent this.

Extra-judicial killings and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilians for political ends are unacceptable but also illegal under international law and should be strongly condemned. Shelling and bombs will not bring peace or calm to the region. A

durable and inclusive solution to the conflict can be achieved only if international humanitarian law and UN resolutions are fully implemented.

The ECCP urges the EU and its member states to intervene with Israel to prevent what already resembles a second Cast Lead. The EU must use all means at its disposal – including political and economic pressure and sanctions – to prevent a new massacre and what could turn into a new war in the region.

Yours sincerely,

Pierre Galand,

Chairman