

# Deprivation and Desperation in Gaza

## Moving Beyond Political Activism

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As conditions in the Gaza strip approach a catastrophic level of deprivation, the world media, and in particular the U.S. media, remain largely silent. The United Nations, whose truckloads of food and medical supplies continue to be denied entry into Gaza by Israel, appears to be one of the few international voices of dissent concerning the collective punishment of 1.5 million human beings. This, despite the fact that more than 50% of the population in Gaza is comprised of children under the age of 15.

Israel claims to be defending itself against the crude, often homemade rockets which militant factions in Gaza fire randomly into southern Israel. Though it may be considered politically incorrect, this writer refuses to precede his remarks with the requisite, "It's wrong for militant Palestinians to be firing rockets into Israel." The ethics of Palestinian resistance to the Zionist colonization of Palestine and the dispossession of the Palestinian people is a subject for another article. The issue at hand is one of collective punishment. Regardless of the actions of certain factions in Gaza, the fact remains that Israel (with the approval of the U.S. and the world community) is depriving an entire civilian population of food, medicine and clean drinking water in response to the violent actions of a few among that population. By any civilized standard this behavior is wrong and should be condemned vociferously. To paraphrase the words of an alien from another planet in a not-so-great Hollywood movie of some years ago, every sentient being knows the difference between right and wrong.

Apparently not. Israel's Foreign Minister and likely future Prime Minister, Tzipi Livni, recently dismissed the notion that Israel's actions in Gaza amount to collective punishment and claimed those actions were a justifiable response to the rocket attacks on Israel. She stated, "The international community must be more decisive in making itself heard and in using its influence in the face of these attacks."

To suggest that the international community should condemn "these attacks" by militant Palestinian factions, yet ignore the humanitarian disaster being imposed on Gaza by the government of Israel demonstrates a nearly incomprehensible level of hypocrisy. But more importantly, the fact that Jews are the ones perpetrating these unconscionable actions in Gaza is a tragedy of historic proportions. The Geneva Conventions, particularly those articles addressing the collective punishment of civilian populations, were largely crafted in response to the treatment of Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Has the sense of exclusivity and entitlement created by the Zionist experiment in Israel become so great that people there no longer see themselves in the mirror of their own history? The irony of Jews, among the most egregiously persecuted and maligned people in history, denying food to hundreds of thousands of children in order, allegedly, to insure their own security, is breathtaking. Who could ever have imagined such a thing?

As people of Gaza suffer, here in the U.S., the vast majority of so-called progressives continue to revel in the recent election of the first Black man to the Presidency. While Obama has garnered a great deal of political and financial support by pledging his unconditional support for the Zionist regime in Israel, he remains completely silent on the plight of the children of Gaza. Our first Black President not only refuses to speak out against the collective punishment of an oppressed people, he actively supports and encourages the regime responsible for this behavior. This too is a tragedy of historic proportions. Have we come this far in the struggle against racism in our country only to see Barack Obama put a minority face on U.S. support for violations of international law and essential human dignity by Israel? Again, one has to say, who could ever have imagined such a thing?

Each morning I peruse the alternative media online and hope to see at least some minor degree of outrage at the situation in Gaza. A small but courageous handful of progressive web sites dare to criticize Israel and speak out against the abuse of the Palestinian people. But for the most part, the glorious and powerful "NetRoots" movement is too busy congratulating itself on the so-called victory it has achieved in the recent elections, too busy celebrating the illusion of change which Barack Obama represents, to admit the absence of any indication of substantive change in U.S. foreign policy in Palestine or the Middle East under his coming administration.

Does it ever occur to those who so blindly and passionately rallied 'round their candidate for the Presidency that they might now use their voices to encourage him to oppose the human rights abuses being orchestrated in Gaza? The sad reality is, not even a chorus of such voices is likely to alter the course Obama appears to have taken. He has surrounded himself with a familiar cast of armchair militarists, corporatists and hard core pro-Zionist zealots who will continue to give their unconditional support to Israel regardless of what barbaric tactics the government there uses to advance the colonization of Palestine. He is choosing to turn his back on the men, women and children in Gaza and the West Bank who suffer chronic malnutrition, desperate poverty, dispossession and daily humiliation at the hands of the Israeli military.

We should stand up in opposition to instances of human rights abuses whenever and wherever they occur. The situation in Gaza is only one on an unfortunately long list, locally, nationally and internationally. And U.S. government (that means you and me) support for and complicity in many such instances is no secret. If each of us were to do just one thing per week to address these issues, the result might surprise us all. Take a minute out from the long and endless chatter of day to day living and speak to a friend about the idea of social equality. Write one letter to the editor of your local paper in support of human rights. Spend just one percent of your online hours learning the truth about our complicity as U.S. citizens in the exploitation and degradation of other people and their cultures. Turn off your television. Go stand on a corner with a sign to protest war. Wear a button promoting peace and justice. One small thing at a time.

To those who became politically active, possibly for the first time, and expended their valuable enthusiasm and energy in order to see Barack Obama elected: thank you for being a part of history. Now why not try on the mantel of social activism? Write our President-elect a letter and suggest that he at least acknowledge the suffering of the people in Gaza. It is doubtful it will change him or his policies, but it may change you. And that truly is "change we can believe in."

Every sentient being knows the difference between right and wrong. The question is, why do

so few of us act on that knowledge?

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