

# Two Years Ago: Israel's Deadly Offensive in the Gaza Strip

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On the eve of New Gregorian Year, the international community commemorates the second anniversary of Israel's deadly offensive in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the continuous blockade of the coastal sliver which has paralyzed the lives of more than 1.5 million impoverished Palestinians living there.

Two years ago and during the final days of 2008, Israel launched an all-out military attack on the Gaza Strip which, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, claimed the lives of 1,417 Palestinians, the majority of whom were innocent women and children. The military assault of the Israel Defense Forces also wounded 5,303 Palestinians, destroyed more than half of the basic infrastructure of the strip and displaced tens of thousands of defenseless civilians.

According to a report published by PCHR, "tens of thousands of Gaza residents continue to live a life of displacement."

"While the United Nations (UN) agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have had the willingness and resources to support the re-construction of the houses Israel destroyed during the war, Israel continues to restrict the entry of construction materials, denying the victims from meaningful relief and from their right to adequate housing," the report continues.

As said by the PCHR report, the "extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly" is a grave breach of the 147th article of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"The Ministry of Housing and Public Works in Gaza announced that 51,553 homes were destroyed or damaged [during the Operation Cast Lead]. Of those 3,336 homes were destroyed completely and 4,021 sustained major damages," the report adds.

Moreover, the statistics published by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) indicate that 2,276 Palestinian homes were destroyed completely during the Gaza offensive of which 1776 sustained major damage.

The same report adds that due to Israel's prevention of the entry of construction materials into the Gaza Strip, 93.3% of the families whose homes were bombarded during the 22-day war have not received assistance and humanitarian aid to reconstruct their homes and thus live in displacement.

Since June 2007 and following the victory of Hamas party in a democratically-administered

election in the Gaza Strip, Israel imposed an extreme siege on the coastal sliver and severed its connection with the outside world in a brutal manner. Since then, the people of Gaza have been deprived of the most rudimentary necessities of their daily life including electricity, foodstuff, fuel, hygienic water, construction materials, stationery and even toys for their children. The deafening silence of the Western governments concerning the Gaza blockade served as a green light to Israel to go on with its aggressive, inhumane policies and exacerbated the pains of the people of Gaza growingly.

According to a December 2010 report by the PCHR which was released a few weeks ago and published on the website of Malaysian Humanitarian Aid, the Gazan citizens are illegally denied the right to travel inside and outside the enclave and their students are not allowed to attend university programs abroad. To one's utmost surprise, the Gazan businessmen and entrepreneurs are prohibited from exporting their goods and productions to the neighboring countries and this has deteriorated the economic situation of the Gaza Strip, leaving thousands of people unemployed and a number of enterprises bankrupt and closed.

Moreover, Israel has been continuously violating the UNSC Resolution 1860 since 2009, failing to open the borders of Gaza and end the crippling blockade of the strip.

However, Despite the fact that the Western governments have turned a blind eye to atrocities and felonies of the Israeli regime and the anguish and suffering of the Palestinian citizens, hope still glimmers in our hearts for the future of Gaza Strip and its innocent people who are in dire need of assistance, sympathy, compassion and above all, understanding.

When Israel launched its first rockets into the Gaza Strip in the early 2009, several international organizations and a number of countries whose leaders have refused to bow down to the pressures of Zionist lobby and remained conscious and independent categorically condemned the barbarity of the Zionist regime and called on the Tel Aviv leaders to end the dangerous game which they had started.

According to the statistics, 34 countries condemned Israel's attacks exclusively and backed the rights of Palestinian people to defend themselves. Remembering the courageous action of the governments of Qatar, Bolivia, Venezuela and Mauritius in severing their diplomatic ties with Israel and the valorous protests of the leaders of 34 countries from the four corners of the world against the butchery of the Zionist regime revitalizes the hopes that consciousness and morality is still alive in the world.

During the first days of the Gaza offensive, almost all of the world countries reacted to the collective punishment of the Palestinian citizens by the murderous Israel Defense Forces and called on Tel Aviv to withdraw from the occupied territories and end its military operation.

One of the most remarkable reactions to the war came from Havana where the Cuban Revolutionary Government called the Israeli military operation "criminal", considering it as "the bloodiest attack Israel has ever launched against the Palestinian people.

The Israeli offensive into the Gaza Strip was so extensive and unexpected that even the European allies of the United States as the biggest supporter and proponent of the Zionist regime dared to criticize Israel and its outlandish policies. On January 7, 2009, Denmark summoned the Israeli ambassador in Copenhagen in protest to attacks on clinics run by a Danish charity in Gaza.

The Gambian President Yahya Jammeh called the Israeli offensive a holocaust that was unleashed on the helpless Palestinians. The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan outspokenly blamed Israel and said that "Israel's bombardment of Gaza shows disrespect to the Turkish Republic. We were planning to schedule peace talks between Syria and Israel. Whatever the reason is, killing innocent civilians will damage peace in the world." A few weeks later and during a World Economic Forum panel discussion with the Israeli President Shimon Peres, Erdogan stated that "the high tone of your voice has to do with a guilty conscience," and "When it comes to killing, you know well how to kill." He consequently walked out of the session in protest to the Israel's massacre of the Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

The African Union published a statement and blamed Israel's onslaught on the Gaza Strip: "The Commission of the African Union (AU) is following with great concern the prevailing situation in the Gaza Strip. The Commission strongly condemns the ongoing air raids on the Gaza Strip by Israel, since 27 December 2008, which has resulted so far in the death of more than 300 Palestinians, while about 1,000 others, including women and children, have been injured."

In a separate statement, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza expressed his "absolute rejection" of the Israeli bombing of the Gaza Strip and urged its immediate halt. He also called for restoration of the cease-fire, an end to the embargo on the Gaza Strip, and the establishment of a new peace initiative

The Non-Aligned Movement, the largest bloc of nations after the UN General Assembly also criticized Israel sharply and issued a communiqué, calling upon the Zionist Regime to end its hostile and aggressive policies in the Gaza Strip and the collective punishment of the Palestinian citizens.

Anyway, Israel couldn't escape the grave consequences of the bloodshed which it staged in the Gaza strip. It lost its few allies at the four corners of the world and helped the people around the world to recognize the reality behind the suffering of the Palestinian nation.

Now, two years have passed and we still remember the pains and quandaries of the Palestinian nation and the people of Gaza. As the Syrian-American musician Michael Heart narrated in his song, "we will not go down, for the Gaza tonight." We, the conscious citizens and freemen around the world will stand by the suppressed people of Palestine until they realize the ultimate victory in their path toward freedom and liberty.

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