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ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY CONDEMNS ISRAELI "WAR CRIMES" IN GAZA

Jerusalem: Human rights groups in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories have called for international sanctions against Israel following deadly bombing raids that have killed more than 300 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

A statement by the Alternative Information Center (AIC), a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization based in Jerusalem and the West Bank, described the Israeli attacks as "blatant war crimes" and called for the indictment of Israel's leaders, including Foreign Affairs Minister Tzipi Livni and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak. The AIC is a partner of The Advocacy Project (AP).

"Israel's military attack on the Gaza Strip is not, as Israel is attempting to claim today, retaliation against Gazan resistance to the Israeli occupation and ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip, but part of a publicly admitted political goal of eliminating the Hamas government in Gaza," said AIC Executive Director Connie Hackbarth.

"Israel is exploiting the last moments of the Bush administration to implement the deadly but ineffective neoconservative policies of utilizing military force to effect political change."

Israeli warplanes bombed Gaza for the third straight day Monday, and the AIC predicted that tanks and ground troops will soon be sent in. Medical facilities in Gaza, already facing shortages, cannot cope with the growing number of casualties.

Demonstrations against the Israeli attacks have occurred throughout the West Bank, and 2,000 protesters attended a joint Palestinian-Israeli demonstration in Tel Aviv on Saturday. The AIC has planned a candlelight vigil for the victims of Gaza Tuesday in Beit Sahour, a suburb of Bethlehem.

According to the AIC, many of the deaths occurred after Israeli planes targeted Palestinian police in civilian population centers in Gaza. The attacks also coincided with the end of the school day, resulting in the deaths of numerous children. Willful killings are a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention under Article 147 and therefore, a war crime.

Palestinian human rights groups have also called for an immediate end to the Israeli assault, and are urging the United Nations Security Council to call an emergency session and demand that Israel respect international humanitarian law. The groups are asking parties to the Geneva Conventions to hold Israel accountable, especially with regard to protecting civilians. The Democracy and Workers' Rights Center (DWRC), an AP partner in Ramallah, urged trade unions worldwide to protest.

According to the AIC, Israel first violated the Gaza ceasefire in early November, by killing six Palestinians and wounding four. In addition, Israel has kept Gaza's 1.5 million residents essentially under siege since June 2007, when the Palestinian faction Hamas took control of the government in Gaza.

Israel has routinely closed Gaza's borders to the passage of people and essential goods, creating a major humanitarian crisis. Most Gazans are now dependent on food assistance. Fuel shortages disrupt running water and electricity, and hospitals lack lifesaving medicines.

- <http://www.alternativenews.org/english/> of the Gaza crisis
- Learn more about the <http://www.dwrc.org/>