

22 January 2009

To:

Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt

Minister for International Development Co-operation Gunilla Carlsson

In view of upcoming political decisions and donor conferences planned for the rebuilding of Gaza, We would like to bring Your attention to the needs expressed on the ground. Sweden needs to take its third states responsibility within International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and demand accountability from conflicting parties that violated IHL.

Based on a call from the Israeli-Palestinian organization Alternative Information Center, we Swedish NGOs would like to support their message that emergency and humanitarian aid to Gaza Strip is counterproductive without political demands. This message is instrumental at this very moment when many countries are rushing to pledge funds for the rebuilding of Gaza in upcoming donor conferences.

The Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip during 27 December 2008 - 18 January 2009 has resulted in the deaths of hundreds, injury of thousands and long-term physical and psychological harm to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. The first estimates of the physical damage to infrastructures and buildings in the Gaza, amount to at least 1.6 billion USD. The immediate and long-term costs of the loss and injury to human lives and spirits, in addition to the damage to roads, schools, hospitals and clinics, water and electricity sources, will reach horrifying levels of historic proportions. The humanitarian crisis created by the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip will take decades from which to recover.

The Palestinian people of the Gaza Strip will require massive emergency and humanitarian assistance in order to meet the most fundamental needs for human existence. However, the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is the result of Israeli long term policies and their attendant military actions. Without addressing the root problems that caused the current humanitarian crisis, international donors will simply enter another cycle of providing emergency and humanitarian assistance for infrastructures and projects that could once again be compromised or destroyed by Israel at a later date.

The root cause of this humanitarian crisis is Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian Territory it occupied in 1967, including the Gaza Strip, effective and control over which Israel continues to yield even following its redeployment of troops in 2005. Without work by the international community, including governments and civil society, to end Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, there simply can be no real change in the situation.

Humanitarian and emergency aid, though offering relief in the short-term, also informs the Israeli occupation. Aid projects are used by Israel to evade its own responsibility, explicit in international humanitarian law, to the occupied population under its control. While aid might save lives in the short run, it also relieves Israel to pay the costs of the destruction that its military actions lead to, and it gives increased budget availability for military spending which would finance future military operations with possible new destructions and damages.

The Israeli government is now stressing the issue of humanitarian aid to Gaza, but they are taking no responsibility at all for the destruction and damages they have caused and they seem to rely on the international community and especially the EU to pick up the

bill. By this Israel is also avoiding its obligation to provide the full scope of reparations to victims of IHL violations.

Swedish NGOs active in the occupied Palestinian territory implementing humanitarian aid and development cooperation asks the Swedish government the following:

1. Gather, analyze and disseminate information about the destruction of Swedish humanitarian aid and development cooperation in Gaza. Share information with other organizations and the media. Encourage other donor countries to do the same, and consolidate e.g. a joint EU and UN damage report.
2. Hold Israel accountable for the destruction it has caused to infrastructure and projects funded by Sweden in the Gaza Strip. The Swedish government and its Embassy in Tel Aviv need to contact the relevant Israeli authorities and demand explanations and full reparations for the destruction of civil infrastructures.
3. Use your political power to ensure international human rights and international humanitarian law. Israel is dependent on international aid to ensure the well-being of the Palestinian population, thus freeing it to take decisions unilaterally and with no consideration for the Palestinians. Donors thus have leverage over the Israeli government and can use it to demand compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law.
4. Don't assist Israel in economically benefiting from its attacks on Gaza. The United Nations estimates that 45% of international aid sent to the Occupied Palestinian Territories flows back into the Israeli economy. The Paris Accords often render it less expensive to import goods to the OPT from Israel rather than neighboring or European countries. Demand that Israeli taxes on emergency and humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip be frozen.
5. Demand right to freely implement emergency and humanitarian projects. Demand free passage of goods and staff into and out of the Gaza Strip, in addition to unhampered movement within the Gaza Strip in order to implement projects, including for local partner organizations. Protest Israeli limitations on Your work, including the associated higher costs in storage and shipping that result accordingly.
6. Support political negotiations grounded in international law between the Palestinians and Israelis. The Oslo Accords have proven irrelevant and the Annapolis process has failed. It is time the international community publicly recognizes this reality and focuses on implementation of all United Nations resolutions and international laws applicable to the Israeli occupation and the Israeli-Arab conflict.

These demands are part of Sweden's third states responsibility within International Humanitarian Law. Continued and new humanitarian aid due to the latest damages and destructions, without political demands, would also risk continuing the vicious cycle of conflict and counterproductive to the long term aims of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Since the EU is striving for a common foreign and security policy on these matters, the Swedish government should also encourage the EU to endorse the proposed actions above. If the above-mentioned measures prove to have no effect, the Swedish government should call upon the EU to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which unequivocally commits Israel to respect human rights and democratic principles,

until Israel has demonstrated a concrete commitment to uphold its responsibilities and obligations accordingly.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lena Ag', with a stylized, cursive script.

Lena Ag
Secretary General
The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bo Forsberg', with a stylized, cursive script.

Bo Forsberg
Secretary General
Diakonia

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Per Gahrton', with a stylized, cursive script.

Per Gahrton
Chairman
The Palestine Solidarity Association in Sweden

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bo Paulsson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Bo Paulsson
Secretary General
The Swedish Organisation for Individual Relief

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jens Orback', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jens Orback
Secretary General
Olof Palme International Center