

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Psychologists for Social Responsibility Calls on the Government of Israel to Lift the Siege of Gaza

The Israeli government's siege of Gaza imposes an unacceptable cost to the health and mental health of the citizens of Gaza. Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) therefore calls upon the Government of Israel to end the siege. We further urge our medical and psychological colleagues in Israel and Palestine to join our call so that those living in the region can return to more normal and secure lives.

In 2007, the Government of Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza that severely limited the importation of food, medicine, and supplies, prohibiting the entry of even such goods as coriander, chocolate, and crayons, and halting virtually all exports and the essential right of freedom of movement. In June 2010, as a result of the international outrage over the attack on the humanitarian aid flotilla, the Israeli Government loosened some of the import restrictions, but many items essential for civilian life remain blocked, and other supplies, while officially not banned, are prevented from entering.¹ Meanwhile, restrictions on freedom of movement continue as does the curtailment of exports, which has no putative defensive justification and is aimed solely at crippling the Gazan economy.²

The siege has had devastating effects on Gaza's 1.5 million inhabitants – 95 percent of industrial establishments have had to close their operations. More than 40 percent of the population is unemployed, and the living standards are desperately low.³ The siege constitutes collective punishment of an entire civilian population, and as such is illegal under international law.⁴

PsySR is especially concerned about the effects of the siege on the mental health and well-being of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, particularly children. A recent study⁵ by mental health practitioners at the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme⁶ reported that since the Israeli military attacks on Gaza in 2008-2009 a large majority of Palestinian children exhibit some symptoms of traumatic stress disorder, and over 95% report that they do not feel safe in their homes.

The long-term psychological impact of prolonged traumatic exposure, exacerbated by the current siege, does not serve the interests of peace and security for either Israelis or Palestinians. Such an impact has the potential to prevent effective negotiations and make it more difficult to arrive at peaceful solutions to the threats all feel in this conflict. Israel has legitimate concerns about rocket strikes from Gaza directed at its civilian population and it is incumbent on the Gaza authorities to take all steps to prevent such attacks, in conformity with International Humanitarian Law. These Israeli concerns, however, are not addressed by the blockade, nor do they justify it.

Palestinians and Israelis are both entitled to the inalienable rights of health, security, and well-being. PsySR therefore calls upon the Government of Israel to comply with international humanitarian law and immediately end the Gaza blockade as a crucial first step toward peace, improved well-being, and stability in the region. We salute those of our medical and psychological colleagues throughout Israel and Palestine who, under extremely difficult conditions, have been addressing the humanitarian and psychological crisis in Gaza and the acts of aggression from parties in both regions. We urge all medical and psychological workers in the region to support our call to lift the siege.

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References:

¹ See Christian Science Monitor, “Israel's Gaza blockade: Millions of dollars worth of aid piles up in warehouses,” August 10, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2010/0810/Israel-s-Gaza-blockade-Millions-of-dollars-worth-of-aid-piles-up-in-warehouses>.

² See the report of the Israeli human rights group GISHA, “Unraveling the Closure of Gaza,” July 5, 2010, <http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/Gisha%20-%20Unraveling%20the%20closure.pdf>.

³ See, e.g., ICRC, “Gaza: 1.5 million people trapped in despair,” June 2009, [http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/palestine-report-260609/\\$File/gaza-report-ICRC-eng.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/palestine-report-260609/$File/gaza-report-ICRC-eng.pdf);

UN, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Locked in: The humanitarian impact of two years of blockade on the Gaza Strip,” Aug. 2009, http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/Ocha_opt_Gaza_impact_of_two_years_of_blockade_August_2009_english.pdf.

⁴ See, e.g., Amnesty International, “Trapped – collective punishment in Gaza,” Aug. 27, 2008, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/feature-stories/trapped-collective-punishment-gaza-20080827>.

⁵ http://www.gcmhp.net/File_files/ResearchJan2k9.htm.

⁶ <http://www.gcmhp.net>.