

January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## **IMMEDIATE STOP TO THE ISRAELI MILITARY OFFENSIVE IN GAZA**

**Respect for international agreements**

**Respect for human rights conventions**

**Protect the civilian population**

**Stop shelling Israeli towns**

**Take responsibility for human suffering**

The Israeli army continues its 'Cast Lead' military operation and war against Palestinians in the Gaza strip. The F-16 jet fighters of the Israeli air force dropped over 100 bombs during the first day and currently 40-60 assaults are targeted in the area where 1.5 million people live in 360 sq kilometers. Israel has destroyed most Palestinian ministries, a university, six mosques, several civil police compounds, clinics and civilian homes. The death toll is approaching 400 and there are over a thousand severely wounded and injured Palestinians. Yet the military offensive has not managed to achieve its stated goal of stopping Hamas from targeting the population in Southern Israel with rockets. The Israeli military offensive should stop immediately, and both sides agree to a ceasefire.

As psychologists we are aware of the long lasting psychological scars, hatred and despair that result from injustices and killing. There is no political justification for military actions on either the Israeli or Palestinian sides.

Israel has upheld a complete siege of Gaza the last 18 months. Medical supplies in the hospitals are subsequently exhausted, and the blockade prevents physicians and other medical staff from their basic tasks of saving human lives. The bombardment of infrastructure has left the majority of the Gaza strip without power and water. The military offensive has thus already caused a human catastrophe for which we, the international community, also carry a responsibility.

As mental health workers, it is our social responsibility to guard psychological wellbeing and healthy child development. We warn that exposing the whole population to overwhelming traumatic stress can lead to a major public health catastrophe, including increases in both somatic illness and psychological distress.

We express our solidarity with colleagues in Gaza who try their utmost to help their fellow man exposed to the major human catastrophe, massacre and destruction. Similarly our support goes to the Israeli human right activists and professionals who guard the moral standards in times of emergency military rule.

We have learned that the Israeli bombardment has destroyed also mental health infrastructure, including Gaza Community Mental Health Program (GCMHP). This is utmost regrettable in times when every effort to protect families and children is needed, and when maintaining mental safety is crucial. GCMHP professionals are dedicated to prevent mental health problems in community level, heal traumatic stress and maintain hope and human dignity.

*We urge our own governments and the international community to put pressure on Israel to stop the mass killings in Gaza and the destruction of property and infrastructure. We urge all institutions that have influence with Hamas to put pressure on them to put an end to the rocket attacks against Israel. We urge all parties to stop supplying military funds and equipment to Israel and all Palestinian factions. We urge Israel and Egypt to end the profoundly immoral embargo of food and medical supplies to Gaza. Unless these goals can be achieved the immediate violence won't end, nor can a wider peace be secured. We demand robust international action that guarantees protection of civilians on both sides. This is a precondition for real peace and reconciliation.*

As mental health professionals, we remind that devastating military targeting of civilian populations constitutes severe risks for the mental health of children in both the Palestinian and Israeli populations. They should be given opportunity to recover and develop as respected fellow human beings and citizens.

On behalf of the International Network of Psychologists for Social Responsibility,

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