



January 13, 2008

Histadrut Statement on the Situation in Southern Israel and Gaza

On Saturday, 27 December 2008, Israel launched operation "Cast Lead" to protect the citizens of southern Israel who were subjected to daily Hamas rocket and mortar fire targeting civilians in cities, kibbutzim and villages. It is important to remember that Israel completely pulled out of Gaza Strip in 2005, dismantling all its civilian settlements.

Since Hamas violently took power in Gaza, it has renounced all agreements with Israel. It has imposed a regime of dictatorship on Gaza citizens, and towards PGFTU leaders, (who were forced to flee to the West Bank in order to save their lives, and the lives of their families) and utilized unlimited aggression towards the Israeli residents in the south of the country.

More than 8,000 missiles and mortars have been fired at Israeli cities, kibbutzim, villages and towns in the last 8 years. Hamas resumed and increased its attacks in recent weeks, unilaterally declaring any calm null and void.

The Histadrut recognizes the urgent need for the State of Israel to operate against the command and control centers of the organizational terror network belonging to Hamas. As clearly stated in its 1988 Charter, the fundamental goal of Hamas is the elimination of the State of Israel, and the institution of an Islamic state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean.

Hamas represents the extremists of the region, those bent on never-ending Jihad and destruction. Together with its allies and sponsors such as Iran and Hizbullah, Hamas not only wants Israel's destruction, but also the destruction of all pragmatic groups in the region, including our counterparts from the PGFTU, who seek a negotiated settlement to the controversial issues and a two-state solution.

Hamas does not acknowledge Israel's right to exist. In contrast, the policy of successive Israeli governments has been to seek a two-state solution (which is strongly supported by several Histadrut resolutions). Israel is entitled to create a clear deterrence in order to avoid further attacks against a million innocent Israeli citizens in general and hundreds of thousands of employees, in particular. Israeli citizens suffer daily from the continual firing of targeted missiles which kill innocent citizens and cause mass destruction of property.

No democratic country in the world would allow its sovereignty to be violated and its citizens to be subjected to terror attacks on a daily basis.

Lethal weapons, among them long-range rockets, are constantly used against civilians living in southern cities in Israel. For example, in the Israeli cities of Be'er-Sheva and Ashdod, both a kindergarten and a school have suffered direct hits.



Thankfully these attacks caused no casualties due to the complete closure of schools in all of southern Israel.

Hamas uses despicable tactics -- such as targeting Israeli civilians while using Palestinian civilians as human shields. As a result, the Israeli Defense Forces are forced to combat the terror infrastructure in the midst of the civilian Palestinian population. This leads to pain and suffering not only on the Israeli side, but also to innocent Palestinians, who are forced by means of violence and dictatorship to collaborate with Hamas and its commanders.

The Histadrut would have preferred that the current situation had not developed this way. Israel embarked on operation "Cast Lead" after acting with great restraint for many years towards unbearable constant terror attacks from Gaza and making every diplomatic attempt to avoid confrontation. Israel agreed to a "state of calm", while Hamas exploited the agreement to build up its forces and rearm. Not only did Hamas rearm itself, but it terminated the calm by launching up to 80 rockets a day at Israeli civilians. By this time, Israel had no choice but to respond to the repeated attacks and aggression as an act of justifiable self-defense.

It is clear to the Histadrut that the culprit responsible for this situation is Hamas-an extremist Jihadist organization recognized as a terrorist organization by United States, European Union, Australia, Canada, Japan and United Kingdom- and not the Palestinian people. Consequently, we support every possible effort to avoid a humanitarian crisis and call on supporting cooperation and coordination efforts with international trade unions as well as organizations which support the distribution of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population.

The Histadrut supports the sincere desire of Israel to avoid harming uninvolved Palestinians by issuing warnings prior to attacks, thus giving Palestinian civilians time to leave the areas under fire, despite the damage to the element of surprise, and the added risk to the Israeli Defense Forces.

The Histadrut greatly regrets every innocent casualty, whether he /she is Israel or Palestinian. The only way to halt the suffering on both sides is to resume the peace process, which will ultimately yield positive results for everyone.

The Histadrut believes that utilizing dialogue and negotiation is the only way this conflict can be solved. Consequently, in 2008 the Histadrut and PGFTU agreed to resume their relationship and succeeded in signing a landmark agreement under the auspices of ITUC headed by Mr. Guy Ryder, which settled all remaining financial issues between the Israeli and Palestinian Labour Federations.

This is a precedent setting agreement which has no equal throughout the world. According to this agreement, the Histadrut will transfer to the PGFTU half of the funds for the Organization Tax collected by the Histadrut from legal Palestinian



workers employed by Israeli employers since the date of the Oslo Agreement signing (September 13th, 1993).

This agreement included the financial obligations that the Histadrut would pay to the PGFTU. The two sides also agreed upon the amounts that have already had been paid. In addition, the Histadrut committed itself to assist Palestinian workers who have worked for Israeli employers, to improve their working conditions, to provide them with legal help, and to cooperate according to the needs assessments of both sides.

The Histadrut expresses its solidarity with the PGFTU in other areas such as making a successful application to the Israeli National Labour Court which resulted in the application of Israeli labor laws to Palestinian workers, who work in the occupied territories. It also supports holding joint projects between the Israeli and Palestinian Transport Workers Unions (the Hotline), and the Israeli-Palestinian Construction Workers Unions which will enable Palestinian construction employees to have vocational training in Israel thus enabling them to be employed by Israeli employers.

We strongly believe that it is a matter of Israeli and Palestinian self interest to have satisfied and relaxed citizens who will not be attracted to extremism or terrorism.

The Histadrut does not want to deal with the political bones of contention in the Israeli-Arab conflict. It is clear to us that the conflict between the two sides is a zero sum game. We believe that the trade unions in our region are the real grassroots representatives and, as such, we have the power to change the atmosphere and to create a stronger mutual understanding. Our role is to protect workers' rights, regardless of differences in religion, race and sex.

It is our sincere hope that immediate cessation of the violence will be achieved and a new security reality created for both Israelis and Palestinians alike. We hope that our joint activities and projects with the PGFTU will be resumed and increased. The Histadrut views our cooperation as a very high priority due to our belief that we must strengthen the pragmatic and reasonable forces on both sides, and not allow the extremists to set the agenda.

The Histadrut will not cease in its efforts to promote peace and mutual understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. We will not allow ourselves to be frustrated by the extremists, whose views and actions, do not assist individual Palestinians nor the Palestinian cause.