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## **A Fast for Human Rights in Gaza Color of Law**

**By David A. Love, JD**

**BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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There are many opinions on the Mideast conflict, but one thing is certain: the situation in Gaza is a humanitarian and human rights disaster, and it cannot continue.

Under the Israeli blockade, the following items are not allowed into Gaza: cars, refrigerators, computers, cement, concrete, wood, glass, light bulbs, candles, matches, books, musical instruments, crayons, clothing, shoes, mattresses, sheets, blankets, pasta, tea, coffee, fruit juice, chocolate, nuts, shampoo, conditioner, and toilet paper. And it takes 85 days to deliver shelter kits into Gaza, and [68 days to send health and pediatric hygiene kits](#).

Rabbi Linda Holtzman of congregation Mishkan Shalom in Philadelphia has taken a stand on Israel's policies in Gaza. In a recent Rosh Hashanah sermon, she discussed the need for people to set limits, and to challenge ourselves to set limits with those we love. "The men and women who have formed the settlements on the West Bank love Israel. All of those who have built barriers, set up roadblocks, and stopped humanitarian aid from entering Gaza, love Israel," Rabbi Linda said. "I too love Israel, but under no circumstances can I condone these actions, and my understanding of love and the limits love demands will not let me sit quietly by while this is taking place."

Rabbi Linda is a part of [Jewish Fast for Gaza](#) (Ta'anit Tzedek), an ad hoc group of

Jewish, Muslim and Christian clergy, as well as other concerned individuals, who have undertaken a monthly daytime fast for Gaza. Founded by activist Rabbis [Brant Rosen](#) and [Brian Walt](#), this association grew out of the Jewish tradition of communal fasting in times of crisis, as a form of mourning and repentance. "As Jews and people of conscience," the group declares, "we can no longer stand idly by Israel's collective punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza." Their efforts have been endorsed by the [Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#) (ACRI).

Jewish Fast for Gaza seeks several goals, including: lifting the blockade that prevents civilian goods and services from entering Gaza; calling for the delivery of humanitarian and developmental aid to the people of Gaza; calling on Israel, the U.S. and the world community to negotiate without pre-conditions with all relevant Palestinian parties, including Hamas, to end the blockade, and calling on the U.S. government to engage Israelis and Palestinians toward a just and peaceful settlement of the conflict. Participants are asked to donate the money they save on food to the American Near Eastern Refugee Aid (ANERA), a relief agency combating Gazan preschool malnutrition.

Israeli and international human rights groups alike were shocked by the most recent Israeli military operation in Gaza - the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force against a civilian population, the massive civilian deaths, and the level of destruction of property and infrastructure it created. As a result of Operation Cast Lead - which was conducted between December 27, 2008 and January 3, 2009 - over 1,400 Palestinians were killed. Of these, 773 were non-combatants (over 60%), including 320 children. These statistics fly in the face of the official narrative that the operation was part of the war on terror, and that those who were killed were the terrorists.

Civilians could not flee the combat, and there was no safe place to hide, as Fred Abrahams, senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, noted. In a [recent report](#) on Operation Cast Lead, Human Rights Watch documented the Israeli Defense Force's (IDF's) illegal use of white phosphorous artillery shells in densely populated areas, and the shooting of unarmed Palestinian civilians - including women and children - waving white flags. Warnings the IDF sent to Gaza residents in the form of fliers and phone calls fell short of international humanitarian law standards. Further, according to a [UN report](#) recently issued by South African Justice Richard Goldstone, "houses, factories, wells, schools, hospitals, police stations and other public buildings were destroyed." Around 240 of the Gazan deaths were police officers. And the Palestinian Legislative Council and a prison were bombed as well.

Further, the Gaza population suffers significant trauma, including insomnia, depression, childhood bed-wetting, and other medium- and long-term mental health problems.

As Jessica Montell, Executive Director of the Jerusalem-based human rights group B'Tselem recently said, "when there is wrongdoing, there must be a remedy". For Montell, justice is to be done at home. This includes not only the individual behavior of Israeli soldiers, but people throughout the chain of command, both military and government, who dictated policy and decided what to target. B'Tselem and all 11 Israeli human rights organizations are calling for a nonpartisan body to examine Israel's conduct in Operation Cast Lead.

After Hamas' electoral win in January 2006, Israel imposed the crippling blockade on

Gaza, turning the territory into the functional equivalent of a prison. The blockade severely limits Gaza's ability to import essentials such as food and fuel, and to export finished products. The result has been a complete devastation of Gaza's economy, and the closing of most of its industrial plants. Increased unemployment, poverty and childhood malnutrition now plague an already economically crippled and depressed region.

Wherever human rights abuses are committed throughout the world, someone must be held to account. And no longer can we turn our backs and close our eyes when injustices occur. Depriving human beings of basic necessities, food, water, employment, and freedom of movement in their own land cannot and will not make Israelis more secure. Maintaining a culture of impunity in the region, and denying people their basic rights and sense of dignity will not bring peace to anyone. It will only result in what Justice Goldstone calls "a situation where young people grow up in a culture of hatred and violence, with little hope for change in the future. Finally, the teaching of hate and dehumanization by each side against the other contributes to the destabilization of the whole region."

Indeed, Gaza is a walled prison, seemingly out of sight and out of mind for some. But the Jewish Fast for Gaza is committed to tearing down the walls that separate us, and allowing justice to flow.

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