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Listening to Justice Goldstone

The African World

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On Friday night I was completely engrossed in an interview conducted by Bill Moyers of Justice Richard Goldstone [[Click here](#) for the transcript of the interview]

Justice Goldstone, a Jewish South African with impeccable credentials as an international human rights advocate and investigator, was charged by the United Nations with the task of conducting an investigation into allegations of human rights abuses and war crimes which took place at the time of the Israeli invasion of Gaza in December 2008. The result, a report adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council this past week, while finding war crimes committed by both sides, represented a stinging indictment of the activities of the Israeli military in its attack on the Gaza.

Moyers, an outstanding interviewer, posed tough questions to Goldstone, many of which were derived from criticisms of Justice Goldstone by anti-Palestinian forces for alleged bias. In fact, a clip of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu addressing the United Nations (played during the show), made such charges quite explicit. Justice Goldstone never wavered. A committed Zionist and long-time friend of Israel, Goldstone described the Israeli behavior in no uncertain terms as an act of collective punishment against the people of Gaza for having elected Hamas (the Islamic resistance movement) in the first place.

The executive summary of the report (the report itself is more than 500 pages) is extremely compelling. Drawn from interviews conducted by Justice Goldstone's committee, the report paints a picture of what one can only be described as barbaric vengeance on the part of the Israelis. The supposed reason behind the attacks lay in

the firing of rockets at Israeli communities by Palestinians from Gaza. While the firing of rockets against civilian targets is understood internationally to be a war crime, the Israeli government had been manipulating the situation against the Gaza for some time, conducting a blockade and, in fact, breaking the truce that had been agreed to with Hamas. In that sense, the Gaza invasion seemed to be a logical extension of the behavior of the Israeli government to neutralize Hamas. It was also consistent with the sort of behavior one observed when Israel conducted its aggressive war against Lebanon in 2006, destroying civilian targets, e.g., airports, and using cluster bombs.

On Friday night Justice Goldstone was absolutely steadfast in his commitment to the conclusions of his report. This has been striking not just in his responses to Moyers' questions on Friday night, but also in terms of his responses to criticisms in the immediate aftermath of the release of his report. While many people with less courage would have retracted their report or, at least, segments of their report, Goldstone stood firm and absolutely unapologetic.

The issuing of the Goldstone report, and its adoption by the UN Human Rights Council, is another signal that something is changing with regard to attitudes towards Israeli aggression and the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Try as anti-Palestinian pundits might, it has been very difficult to debunk the report. Had the chair of the investigating committee been someone more closely identified with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, the Israeli allegations of bias might have had greater international weight. In the case of Goldstone's report, such charges simply did not/do not pass the straight face test. Even the United States, with the shameful criticism of the Goldstone report by Ambassador Susan Rice, could not identify one factual error in the report or one concrete reason that would support a notion of alleged bias.

The Goldstone report needs to be popularized. While most people will not read its 500+ page analysis, the gist of the report needs to be broadly circulated. It is a condemnation of the horrific approach that the Israeli government has taken, not only towards Gaza, but towards the entirety of the Occupied Territories. As such, it must be used as another argument as to why economic, political and military support for the Israeli government and its Occupation needs to be halted.

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.



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