

CCAR Resolution on the Crisis in Gaza and the Negev

Adopted January 15, 2009

Background

From 1948 to 1967, the Gaza Strip was occupied by Egypt. In 1967, Egypt and its allies attempted to destroy the State of Israel with acts of war. Thankfully, Israel was victorious. At the end of that war, Israel occupied surrounding territory, including the Gaza Strip, as a buffer against future aggression. In the late 1970s, as a result of the Camp David Accords, and in the context of a negotiated peace treaty, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. Israel wished to return the Gaza Strip to Egypt as well, but Egypt declined.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally ended its occupation of the Gaza Strip, removing its entire military presence as well as painfully relocating a civilian Israeli population which had settled there.

Since 2000, Hamas terrorists in Gaza have launched nearly 8000 rockets at the civilian populations of Sderot, Ashkelon, and other Israeli communities. In the city of Sderot, nearly three-quarters of children exhibit signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the town's bus stops have all been converted to reinforced bomb shelters. Children have grown up under the constant threat of Hamas rockets; and families sleep in small bunkers, knowing that 15 seconds, the amount of time from the warning siren to the bomb strike, is not enough time to rouse everyone.

Israel's disengagement from Gaza, sadly, did not lead to any reduction in the bombing. Moreover, during a "cease fire," to which the Hamas leadership in Gaza declared an end last month, Hamas bombing of these southern Israeli communities did not cease. Moreover, instead of utilizing the cease-fire as an opportunity to storehouse food and water, Hamas stockpiled weapons. The cease-fire proved to be, more than anything else, an opportunity for Hamas to replenish and upgrade its rocket arsenal.

We are taught, "Seek peace and pursue it." At the same time, every moral teaching, from Torah to modern Just War Theory, instructs nations to defend their innocent civilians under attack. After exhausting every other alternative, Israel has engaged in an armed struggle against the Hamas terrorists in Gaza, aiming to end the attacks on Negev communities.

The Israeli government has expressed the anguish of the Israeli people at the loss of innocent life. Tragically, Hamas cynically places its militants and its munitions in the midst of civilian populations, including children. As a result, Israel's necessary military actions have tragically resulted in the deaths of innocents, despite the extraordinary steps taken by Israel's military to protect and avoid harming civilians.

The United States government, often as a lone voice among the nations of the world, has expressed solidarity with Israel, defending Israel's right to protect its citizens.

Most recently, we have seen anti-Semitic outbreaks, some of them violent, reputedly in response to Israel's military action in Gaza.

We have been taught to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem;" therefore,

The Central Conference of American Rabbis:

1. Expresses solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Israel;

2. Affirms the right, indeed the obligation, of Israel to protect its citizens, including through military action;
3. Joins the government and people of the State of Israel in mourning, expressing pain and anguish at the deaths of innocents, both Israeli and Palestinian;
4. Prays for the welfare of all members of the Israel Defense Forces, mourns the loss of life among their ranks, and prays for the healing of their injured;
5. Encourages Israel to continue taking all appropriate steps to alleviate human suffering in Gaza;
6. Condemns recent outbreaks of anti-Semitism around the world;
7. Commends the Bush Administration for its support of Israel through numerous means, including its veto power in the United Nations Security Council;
8. Urges the current and incoming U.S. Administrations to engage more actively in the region, to aid Israel in securing a just and lasting peace for itself and its neighbors; and
9. Looks forward to demonstrating our solidarity in person, when we shall gather for our annual Convention, to be held in Jerusalem, February 24-March 1, 2009.