

Why We Chained Ourselves to the Israeli Consulate – Jewish Angelenos Oppose Israeli Siege on Gaza

by Lisa Adler, Robin Ellis, and Eric Romann

On January 14, 8 Jewish Angelenos — including us — chained themselves to the Israeli Consulate on Wilshire Boulevard in protest of Israel's attacks on the people in Gaza.

On that day and on days since, many have asked us why we, as Jews, oppose Israeli actions in Gaza. But it is because we are Jewish that we need to oppose this criminal military action. As violence is being done in our name, we have no other choice.

As Americans, we oppose our government's support for Israel's war crimes. We urge President Obama to fulfill his promise of change by making a clear break from longstanding unequivocal U.S. support for Israel.

The fighting is over, at least for now. But that doesn't mitigate the horror of what we've seen these past three weeks. This conflict has left innocents dead on both sides. But it has been far worse for the largely defenseless, impoverished and occupied population of Gaza, under attack from the region's lone military superpower. Since December 27, 13 Israelis have been killed, including 4 soldiers killed by other soldiers in "friendly fire." In the same period, Israel's attacks have killed more than 1300 Palestinians. They have injured more than 5,000 — a third of them children. Israel has dropped bombs on schools, mosques, and a UN humanitarian compound. It has destroyed much of Gaza's infrastructure.

Put simply, Israel's attacks were not "self-defense." They were war crimes.

This is, admittedly, not a popular opinion with American Jews. As we were chained to the Israeli consulate, a few Jewish passer-bys called us traitors to our people, and even told us we were not truly Jewish. But standing against oppression is essential to our identities as Jews. Our stand against the Israeli siege of Gaza is part of a long, proud tradition of Jewish social justice. It is a tradition that many American and Israeli Jews have lost sight of. But we believe that those brave Jewish freedom fighters who gave their lives for civil rights here in the U.S. would be proud of us.

We, better than any, know that criticizing Israel is NOT anti-Semitic — however much its supporters may claim that it is. We hope that our saying so will make people of all races and religions more willing and able to speak out against Israel's crimes. The basic Zionist idea — that Jewish safety can be secured only through a state built on the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people — is ultimately responsible for the violence of the conflict. It promises permanent war for the people of the region, while fomenting animosity towards Jews worldwide.

A lasting peace can be achieved, but only by upholding basic principles of justice. That is, by granting Palestinian people their individual and collective rights guaranteed under international law. This includes Israel's complete withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and the right of return for several million Palestinian refugees displaced through the wars of 1948 and 1967.

The path toward peace and justice must begin this week with Israel withdrawing its troops from Gaza and ending its suffocating blockade of the strip, made possible by Israel's continued control of Gaza's air space, ports, and borders. This blockade, which stretches back 18 months, has denied 1.5 million Gazans access to the basic necessities of life and caused a "humanitarian catastrophe" according to UN official Richard Falk.

Everyday Americans must walk this path, as well. As we did in the 1980s with South African apartheid, we can lend a tremendous hand to the cause of peace and justice in Israel and Palestine. People of conscience here in the U.S. must demand that our government stop giving \$3 billion in aid every year to fund Israel's war crimes and violations of international law. And we must use the most effective nonviolent means we have at our disposal, like an international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions.

As Jewish people of conscience, we ask all those who stand for justice and see the necessity of peace to join us in these efforts.

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