

Dear Justice Richard Goldstone,

The recent escalation in the Israeli army incursions into the Gaza strip is of grave concern to us at the Coalition of Women for Peace. The prospect of yet another flare out of large scale violence against civilians is alarming. Your recent comments on the Goldstone report are already interpreted by Israeli officials and the mainstream media channels as complete and full absolution of Israel's military conduct in its entirety. Yet, the conclusions drawn from your statement with respect to Israel's conduct during the Cast Lead military campaign and especially its aftermath are not backed by any new facts or findings. This seriously undermines the international, Israeli and Palestinian civil society struggle for accountability and against impunity from grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

You state that "we know more today about what happened in Gaza." Which new facts have been uncovered? We who monitor the Israeli government and the situation closely on the ground know that no information was brought out to contradict the meticulous documentation of the fact finding mission you headed. In fact, it is the international pressure generated by the publication of the Goldstone report that has forced Israel to launch a significant number of investigations in the first place. These investigations corroborate what the Israeli and Palestinian civil societies already know: Israel systematically fails to conduct thorough and impartial investigations meeting international standards. As a matter of fact, most investigations prompted by the Goldstone report have not been completed yet, and those which have been completed generated only three rather minor indictments of lower rank soldiers. Considering the scope of destruction and the civilians killed during operation Cast Lead, it cannot be said that those responsible for grave violations that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity have been brought to justice.

A key contribution of the Goldstone report to the public comprehension of the Israeli/Palestinian reality has been its readiness to approach seriously the actual context of the outbreak of violence in Gaza. This is the persistent blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip, and its continued control on Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The recommendations to Israel - carrying your distinguished signature as a world renowned jurist - clearly addressed the blockade on Gaza, calling on Israel to immediately cease the border closures and allow free passage of goods and people to and from the Strip. The report recommends that Israel release Palestinian political prisoners, and cease actions that limit the expression of dissent by civil society organizations. The innovation of the report was precisely its readiness to acknowledge the overwhelming responsibility of the powerful party in the conflict

Israel ignored the report and its recommendations, and did not lift the blockade or stop the persecution of Palestinian civilians and human rights defenders. The only notable change in the status quo was the escalation, immediately following the publication of the Goldstone report, of government attacks and the campaign of de-legitimization of human rights organizations and civil society. The Israeli government is currently promoting legislation, which aims at curbing our freedom of expression, freedom of association and basic social and political liberties. This political persecution is further marginalizing and excluding Palestinian and Jewish women in Israel, who oppose the militarized political establishment.

The Goldstone report gave an official international force to the ever increasing demand to hold Israel accountable for grave violations of international law. Your statements undermine the credibility of the United Nations and its ability to effectively enforce international standards of conduct and international humanitarian and human rights law. Now more than ever the stakes are high for those struggling for accountability and against impunity in Israel/Palestine. Your statement raises the stakes further by granting Israel legitimacy it so desperately needs to continue its aggressive campaigns of repression of dissent on the domestic and international front.

Dear Justice Goldstone, we are asking you to do all that is in your power to enable the international community to hold Israeli leaders accountable. Only a serious commitment to accountability, which would end Israel's impunity can prevent the next war. As it stands now, your statement is already used to justify and legitimize future crimes, even before the next war has started.

Coalition of Women for Peace (Israel)

cwp@coalitionofwomen.org

www.coalitionofwomen.org/?p=2059&lang=en