

Israel Calls Ceasefire in Gaza

Israel's prime minister initiated a unilateral ceasefire over the weekend while also addressing the devastation faced by Palestinians in Gaza.



[] Israel agreed to a ceasefire Saturday after its three-week operation in Gaza significantly disrupted anti-Israel military operations ran by Hamas, an Islamic militant group and terrorist organization that violently seized control of Gaza in 2007.

“Conditions have been created [in Gaza] so that our targets, as defined when we launched the operation, have been fully achieved, and more so,” said Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. “Hamas was badly stricken, both in terms of its military capabilities and in the infrastructure of its regime.

“Its leaders are in hiding,” he said. “Many of its members have been killed. The factories in which its missiles were manufactured have been destroyed. The smuggling routes, through dozens of tunnels, have been bombed. The Hamas’s capabilities for conveying weapons within the Gaza Strip have been damaged.”

In addition to commending his fellow countrymen, military and government leaders, Olmert expressed sympathy for the Palestinian population caught in the fray of what he said is an Israeli-Hamas battle. “I also wish to say something to the people of Gaza,” Olmert said. “We do not hate you; we did not want and do not want to harm you. We wanted to defend our children, their parents, their families. We feel the pain of every Palestinian child and family member who fell victim to the cruel reality created by Hamas, which transformed you into victims.

“Your suffering is terrible. Your cries of pain touch each of

our hearts," Olmert said. "On behalf of the Government of Israel, I wish to convey my regret for the harming of uninvolved civilians, for the pain we caused them, for the suffering they and their families suffered as a result of the intolerable situation created by Hamas."

Throughout Israeli airstrikes on Hamas command centers, training camps, and rocket manufacturing and storage facilities, Israel delivered continuous humanitarian aid to Gaza civilians by calling for daily ceasefires—which went largely ignored by Hamas.

The Jewish leader of an influential Christian lobby told *Charisma*

Monday that the ceasefire could offer Israel temporary peace, but he worries what happens in the long run if Hamas remained in control of Gaza.

"Since 2001, over 10,000 rockets and mortars have been fired into Israel from Gaza [by Hamas]," said David Brog, executive director of Christians United for Israel. "This was an untenable situation. Israel had to make it clear to Hamas that such rocket fire is unacceptable and will not be tolerated ... but we must never lose sight of the fact that Hamas remains a terrorist organization committed to Israel's destruction. There will never be long-term quiet or real peace for Israel or the Palestinians so long as Hamas continues to be in control of Gaza."

Olmert noted it was the success of Israel's military along with the willingness of the international community to intervene that could ultimately create hope for achieving a "maximum stability" in the region by weakening the strength of Hamas.

Meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni was in Washington last Friday to sign a "Memorandum of Understanding" with the United States, which is aimed at preventing Hamas and other terrorist groups from smuggling weapons through underground tunnels between Gaza and Egypt.

Olmert mentioned that the prime ministers of Great Britain and Italy, as well as the leaders of Germany and France, expressed "profound commitment" to assisting Israel in ensuring that weapons no longer reach terror organizations based in Gaza.

Following Israel's first airstrike in Gaza last month, Christian and Jewish observers quickly defended Israel's actions as self-defense against Hamas, even though many in the mainstream media criticized Israel's incursion into Gaza.

Mideast analyst and best-selling author Mike Evans told *Charisma* in December that it was "vital" that the international community and Arab world "turn its attention to Hamas as the perpetrator," not Israel.

"Hamas is not above using innocent Palestinian [blood] to achieve its radical agenda," Evans said. "It is obvious that [Hamas] leaders have no regard for the sanctity of life and will go to any lengths to achieve their fundamentalist aims. This heinous conduct exposes women and children ... and places the onus for any deaths directly on Hamas."

During the early stages of Israeli air raids Livni told parliament that Hamas had finally forced the Jewish state to take action after nearly a decade of thousands of rocket attacks. "We did everything we could to prevent a deterioration of the situation," she said. "We have conducted ourselves with unsurpassed restraint. We grinded our teeth, bit our lips, unturned every stone, to prevent the need for widespread action.

"Israel would like to reiterate," she added, "to anyone with complaints about the [safety of the Palestinian] population, to redirect them to the party directly responsible for the population's situation—Hamas, which is holding the population hostage."

Christian broadcaster Earl Cox, founder of Israel Always and the organizer of a worldwide day of prayer for Israel on New Year's Day, narrowly escaped injury from a Hamas rocket attack last week while reporting from southern Israel.

According to The Israel Project, an international nonprofit group devoted to Israeli peace and security, the Hamas terror campaign in Gaza was backed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the world's "largest state sponsor of terrorism and a chief sponsor of Palestinian terrorism." The group also claimed Iran has provided Hamas annually with \$20- and \$30 million and that Iran trains Hamas operatives in Iran and Syria.

-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli

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