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A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L
A S S O C I A T I O N

American Anthropological Association Committee for Human Rights

Statement Regarding Israeli Attack and International Siege on the Gaza Strip

To the Governments of Israel, the United States, and the EU:

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert
3 Kaplan St., Qiryat Ben-Gurion
PO Box 187
91919 Jerusalem
fax: 972-2-6512631

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500
FAX: 202-456-2461

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Mr. Tony Blair
Middle East Envoy for the Quartet
P.O. Box 60519
London
W2 7JU UK

The Committee for Human Rights of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) would like to express its deep concern about the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip, and the humanitarian consequences of the 22 day-long attack by the Israeli army. Our concern speaks to the AAA's disciplinary and professional commitment to furthering and defending the cultural, political and human rights of the world's peoples. The AAA, which currently has over 11,000 members, is the largest professional organization of anthropologists in the world.

The three weeks of Israeli bombardment were a disproportionately violent attack on a territory approximately twice the size of Washington D.C., home to some 1.5 million Palestinians, two-thirds of whom are refugees. The repercussions of these assaults will be felt by the region's peoples for decades to come. The UN states that as of January 19, 1,314 Palestinians have been killed. Of those, some 580 were women and children. More than 5,300 have been injured, and half of those sustained severe injuries such as fractures, amputations, burns and head wounds that will require rehabilitation to prevent permanent disability. More than 66,000 Palestinians have not been able to return to their homes, and many are without running water. The massive airstrikes against Gaza targeted military and civil installations, included civilian police, the education ministry, culture ministry, universities, as well as private houses, hospitals, and mosques. Much of the basic infrastructure of the small strip of land has been destroyed, including the systems that

provide water, electricity, and sanitation. Supplies of basic foodstuffs and fuel, and the provision of medical, water and sanitation services remain critical.¹

Of particular concern is the targeting of civilian institutions, including schools, and the use of white phosphorous on civilians by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).² Military operations, including aerial bombing over civilian populations is in direct violation of Israel's legal requirement as a signatory of the Geneva Convention to take all feasible precautions to avoid harming civilians during military operations. The Fourth Geneva Convention also prohibits collective punishment, without exception. (Art. 33). Many believe that the use of white phosphorous violates the ban on incendiary weapons in the international Convention on Conventional Weapons. (Art. 1, Protocol III). Although Israel is not a signatory to this Convention, its use of such weaponry, which has been banned by the international community, including most recently the United State, violates international standards of human rights and the requirement to protect civilian populations during military operations.³ Amnesty International reports that evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity is mounting daily.⁴

The attack on Gaza comes on the heels of the 18-month blockade that Israel and its allies have imposed on the Gaza Strip since 2006. The siege has contributed to severe shortages of medical supplies and food. The number of households in Gaza below the poverty line reached an unprecedented high of nearly 52 per cent in 2007. Joblessness in Gaza between July and December 2007 reached 45.3 per cent (UNRWA 2008, OXFAM 2007). The U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food has found that acute malnutrition in Gaza is on the same scale as in the poorest nations in the southern Sahara, with more than half of all Palestinian families eating only one meal a day. Eighty per cent of families in Gaza rely on humanitarian aid (OXFAM 2008).

We recognize that every state has a right and a duty to protect its citizens. This fact does not, however, in any way absolve the Israeli government and military from the requirement that they be held accountable to the norms of international humanitarian and human rights laws for their actions in Gaza. Just as Israelis have a right to live in peace and security, so do the Palestinians. Throughout the occupied territories of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, Palestinians live in ceaseless all-encompassing insecurity and vulnerability that deprive residents of fundamental freedoms.

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http://www.ochaopt.org/gazacrisis/admin/output/files/ocha_opt_gaza_humanitarian_situation_report_2009_01_19_english.pdf

² Numerous international and Israeli news outlets have documented the use of white phosphorus on Palestinian civilians. See among others:

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article5556027.ece;
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7848768.stm; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1054947.html>); and stories in *The Guardian* (UK) on January 16, 2009 and *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 2009.

³ International human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch have denounced Israeli use of white phosphorus in Gaza; see for example, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/01/22/incendiary-idf-kenneth-roth>; and <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/01/10/israel-stop-unlawful-use-white-phosphorus-gaza>

⁴ http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=551

Given the above, we, the AAA Committee for Human Rights, request the following:

1. that Israel and the international community immediately lift the siege and blockade on Gaza to allow vital medical and humanitarian supplies to get through to civilian populations and to allow the free movement of civilians in and out of Gaza
2. that the United States and the European Union establish an independent and impartial investigation of abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, including and especially where there were significant civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip
3. that the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention comply with its legal obligations detailed in Article 146 of the Convention to search for and prosecute those responsible for grave breaches, including war crimes and the misuse of weapons such as white phosphorus
4. that Israel allow free access to Gaza for media and members of the international and Israeli human rights communities
5. that Israel grant academic freedom and freedom of movement to students and scholars in Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank

Committee for Human Rights
American Anthropological Association
February 5, 2009