



Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

United States Section

Statement on May 2021 War in Israel and Palestine

May 21, 2021

We, the US Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, call on the United States government to halt its yearly \$3.8 billion in military aid to the state of Israel (\$10 million per day) and call on the US Congress to deny the request from the Biden Administration to sell an additional \$735 million of precision-guided missiles to Israel.

The Current Situation in Israel and Palestine

During the last 11 days, Israel has relied heavily on US made weaponry to kill (at least) 232 Gazans, including 65 children and injure thousands of Gazans. The death toll and those injured climbs every day. Israel's bombs have destroyed hundreds of residential buildings and housing units, leaving over 72,000 Gazans homeless. The World Health Organization reports that Israeli strikes and shelling have damaged at least 18 hospitals and clinics in Gaza, including Gaza's only Covid-19 laboratory. Israel targeted and destroyed much of the road leading to Shifa, Gaza's largest hospital. Israeli bombs have severely damaged much of Gaza's infrastructure leaving hundreds of thousands of Gazans without access to water. The *New York Times* reported on May 18 that sewage waste runs through the streets of Gaza. James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, reported simultaneously that Gazans are running out of food. Because of Israel's 13+ year total blockade of Gaza, Palestinians living there have no way to escape Israel's relentless bombing campaign.

Israel destroyed the high rise that housed the offices of the Associated Press and Al Jazeera and another building in which the Nawaa Online Media Network, a news platform affiliated with women's rights groups and youth organizations, was located. Another Israeli bomb killed a Palestinian journalist. The Middle East and North Africa spokesman for The Committee To Protect Journalists noted that these actions strongly suggest Israel is seeking to cut off news coverage of what is happening in Gaza, especially the suffering from the Israeli attacks.

The current Israeli assault on Gaza is the fourth since 2008. The 2008-9 assault killed 1,417 Palestinians and the 2014 assault killed 2,251 Palestinians, including over 500 children. Neither Hamas, the *democratically elected* ruling party in Gaza, nor Fatah, the ruling party in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, have armed forces. Israel is a nuclear power with one of the most modern armed forces in the world. The US supplies more weapons to Israel than to any other country in the world, including F-16 and F-35 warplanes, Apache attack helicopters, M-19 howitzers and M270 rocket-launchers. This latest war between Israel and Hamas was triggered over the last few weeks by events-related to Israel's settler colonial and apartheid policies:

- During Ramadan Palestinians prayed in the thousands at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam. Israeli Defense Forces stormed the mosque and sprayed Palestinians with sound bombs, tear gas and potentially lethal rubber bullets, injuring over 330 persons.

- Another catalyst was the Israeli government's ongoing attempt to expel Palestinians from their homes in several East Jerusalem neighborhoods, to replace them with Jewish settlers, most recently in Sheikh Jarrah.

Background History

Between December 1947 and December 1948, Zionist forces ethnically “cleansed” over 500 Palestinian villages and Palestinian neighborhoods in cities such as Jerusalem, Haifa, Lydda and Jaffa. During this time 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly transferred or fled in terror. At the time, they became the largest refugee population in modern history. Although United Nations Resolution 194 (passed 11 December 1948) resolved that Palestinian “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date,” Israel never allowed any Palestinian refugee to return.

After Israel declared itself a state in May 1948, Jordan held jurisdiction over East Jerusalem. In the 1950s, in cooperation with the UN Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA, the UN agency charged with aiding Palestinian refugees), Jordan built homes in East Jerusalem for many Palestinian refugee families. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, Israel took control of the Palestinian West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel has occupied this land ever since, annexing East Jerusalem in 1980. Israel did this despite the unanimous passage by the UN Security Council of Resolution 242 (22 November 1967) which affirmed the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.”

Since 1967, Israel has continually expelled Palestinians from their homes and villages and taken their land and natural resources so it could transfer Jewish citizens to huge Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Per the Fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949, signed by Israel, the US and 194 other countries, it is illegal for an Occupying Power to transfer its own civilian population to territory it occupies.

There are now upwards of 600,000 Jewish settlers living on the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Israel has a separate set of laws for Jewish and Palestinians. The settlers are citizens of Israel but Palestinians have no right to free speech and assembly and cannot vote in Israeli elections.

Israel has built separate highways for settlers and a “separation/apartheid” wall 70 kilometers long and 8-9 meters high, cutting Palestinians off from one another. Palestinians must pass through multiple checkpoints, staffed by belligerent Israeli soldiers, and line up for hours to pass through cattle chute-like structures to get to schools, jobs, stores and health clinics.

Since January, Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem, the leading Israeli human rights organization, have published highly documented reports calling all of Israel an apartheid society which denies basic human rights to all Palestinians

Since the 1970s, Jewish settlers have been fighting in Israeli courts to take over Palestinian homes in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan and other Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. A final decision by Israel's Supreme Court was to be handed down recently on whether several Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah could be expelled. In support of the Sheikh Jarrah families facing the threat of imminent expulsion, Palestinians demonstrated in the streets. Israeli police responded by raiding and damaging Sheikh Jarrah homes, firing at Palestinians with rubber bullets, tear gas and "skunk water". Israeli violence resulted in hundreds of injuries to protesters and emergency medical services workers.

In response to the violent Israeli police raids at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and in Sheikh Jarrah, Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza fired rockets into Israel on May 10. Israel then began its latest barbaric assault on Gaza.

The US Government Position on Israeli War Crimes

The US government has continually enabled and emboldened Israel's settler-colonial apartheid rule. Not only has the US given Israel the military weaponry to destroy Gaza and other Palestinian enclaves many times over, the US has used its veto power in the UN Security Council 44 times to shield Israel from accountability for war crimes or human rights violations. It is of great relevance that in all 44 UN votes, the US was the **sole country** to veto resolutions holding Israel accountable

WILPF US Calls on the US Government

The US Section of WILPF has a history of calling for a halt to all military aid to Israel. Again, now, we call on the Biden Administration and Members of Congress to halt this military aid.

The US government must cease acting as an enabler of Israel's ongoing mistreatment of and attacks against the Palestinians and continuous assaults on Gaza. **We call on the US government to immediately and publicly exert strong diplomatic and economic pressure on Israel:**

- 1) **To make sure the ceasefire holds and that agreements of terms are followed through.**
- 2) **To end its siege of Gaza**
- 3) **To end its occupation of the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem**
- 4) **To allow all Palestinian refugees the right of return to their lands and homes stolen by Israel since 1948**

For the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom US –