

JDI Statement on the violent deterioration of the conflict in Israel and Gaza

Thursday 20 May 2021

The Jewish Democratic Initiative has witnessed with despair and horror the eruption of a new cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. We unequivocally condemn all violence whether perpetrated by Israel, Hamas or extremists amongst Jews and Palestinians.

The escalation into armed conflict was triggered by the fundamentally unfair attempt to dispossess long-standing Palestinian residents from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah; protests and violent clashes at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound and an unstable Israeli government. After an ultimatum from Hamas for Israeli forces to withdraw from the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound, Hamas and Gaza based militants fired thousands of rockets into Israel, placing civilians under attack. This elicited a powerful military response from Israel focusing on targets in Gaza, the source of the rocket fire. Israel has destroyed some of Gaza's civilian infrastructure including Covid-19 testing lab, hospitals and clinics. There has also been an eruption of violence in Israel's cities, exposing long standing grievances around inequality between Israeli Arab and Jewish citizens.

JDI calls on all parties to the conflict to observe international law and condemns the apparent disregard for international humanitarian law displayed thus far. As Gisha stated, "Hamas and other armed groups' grave violations of international humanitarian law do not release Israel from its obligations toward Gaza residents living under its occupation. Civilians must be protected."

We mourn the deaths and the lasting trauma caused by this violence. We are concerned how the polarising discourse and propaganda currently circulating is further separating people into pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian camps. We call on our own South African Jewish community and all those supporting freedom to be voices for peace and reconciliation rather than perpetuating one-sided narratives. We must move beyond the binary and recognise our common humanity.

JDI supports the international appeal to Israel and Hamas to accept an **immediate ceasefire**. However, the only permanent insurance for stability and enduring peace for the State of Israel, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and Palestinian-Israelis is to actively pursue negotiations with the goal of **ending the Occupation, creating a pathway for peace between Palestinians and Israeli's and enshrining equality of rights and resources for all citizens**.

This time must be different and must be the last armed conflict between these two peoples. To this end, the JDI calls on our Jewish communal institutions, government structures and fellow South Africans to educate themselves further, engage from a perspective of democratic values, and advocate for a peaceful and equitable end to this conflict. South African Jews, guided by our history of persecution and dispossession, and the experience of Apartheid, call for the values of democracy and equality of all peoples to prevail. As beneficiaries of democracy, we must demand those same rights for those under the control of a government in Israel that claims to speak for us, and for a homeland to which many of us feel a profound connection.

The only way forward is together. We are moved by the calls of Palestinian and Jewish activists in Israel and Palestine for equality, justice and peace. We call not only for the end to violence but enshrining a new reality in the Middle East for both Israelis and Palestinians.