

Dear Minister Downer,

We write to you as Muslim community organisations deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of our Muslim and Christian brothers, sisters, and children in Palestine. Israel's military occupation of Palestine and the corresponding Palestinian struggle for self-determination and justice is the single most important issue for Muslims globally.

The conflict not only impacts upon the entire Middle East, but is central to relations between 'Islam' and the 'West'. Analysis of the causes and consequences of conflict in the Middle East since 1945, by such scholars as Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, has concluded that a defusion of the conflict between 'Islam' and the 'West' depends on a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

With Israel's most recent invasion of the Gaza Strip, the conflict has reached another turning point for the worst. Israel's unwillingness to release women and children from prison in exchange for information about a captured soldier is telling of the complete lack of interest this nation has in diplomacy. Israel has the ability to use brute force and prefers to use it above all other options.

Our immediate concern is concentrated on the Israeli bombing of electric power stations in the Gaza Strip, which constitutes a war crime as the direct impact of such an act falls on the civilian population. The major consequence will be manifested in the inability of the Palestinian population to power water pumping and sanitation facilities. A humanitarian disaster is imminent.

Equally outrageous is Israel's kidnapping of numerous members of the Palestinian parliament, who were democratically elected. Your response to this particular incident is a test of your true commitment to and respect for democracy. In this day and age, no nation on earth conducts itself in the way Israel does. It is highly inconsistent that your government so closely associates itself with the government of Israel on the one hand, and then speaks of freedom and democracy on the other.

Much popular attention is generally paid to Palestinian acts of terrorism, particularly suicide bombings. We expect you and the Australian government to condemn terrorism irrespective of the perpetrator. Israel's policies and practices do meet the US and UN definitions of terrorism. While there is a lack of agreement among UN member-states as to a definition of terrorism, UN Resolutions, such as GA Resolution 51/210 (1999), *Measures to eliminate international terrorism*, define the term as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them".

Alternatively, terrorism expert A.P. Schmid suggested in 1992 to take the existing consensus on what constitutes a "war crime" as a point of departure. As the core of war crimes is deliberate attacks on civilians, hostage taking and the killing of prisoners, he argued that this standard be extended to peacetime, thereby defining acts of terrorism as "peacetime equivalents of war crimes". Moreover, in a UN Report of 2004 terrorism was defined as any action "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act". Israel's practices, past and present, meet these definitions of terrorism. Are you prepared to condemn them as such? Or is it only terrorism when a Muslim person, group, or nation is the perpetrator, rather than the victim?

We specifically write to you because as Minister of Foreign Affairs you have repeatedly expressed uncritical support for Israeli's policies and practices. We seek your response to the following pertinent questions. Do you condone or condemn Israel's kidnapping of democratically elected Palestinian representatives? Do you condone or condemn the imprisonment of Palestinian men, women and children whose 'crime' is resisting Israel's illegal occupation? Do you condone or condemn the current Israeli attack on and invasion of the Gaza Strip? Do you condone or condemn Israel's targeting electric power stations and other civilian infrastructure that is likely to result in the suffering of the civilian population?

Please note that our community does expect a response to these questions.

Sincerely,

Al-Nisa' Youth Group Inc
Crescents of Brisbane
Fair Go for Palestine
Federation of Australian Muslim Students and Youth
Islamic Council of Queensland
Mujlis Ulema of Queensland
Muslim Business Network
Muslim Youth of Queensland