

Statement Condemning Recent Violent Actions toward Palestinians by Israel

Background

Dr. Arik Greenberg, founder of the Institute for Religious Tolerance, Peace and Justice, has been called upon by his interfaith allies to issue a statement regarding the recent actions of Israel with respect to its Palestinian citizens. Having taken many years to cautiously analyze the situation and formulate a deliberate and appropriately measured response, and having long been encouraged by our inaugural board member, the late Dr. James A. Sanders, to draft a statement on the ongoing turmoil between Israelis and Palestinians, we feel it overdue, but timely to offer such a statement at this time.

Statement of condemnation of actions

Though we strongly support the right of Israel to defend itself against external attacks and to ensure its domestic security, the unbalanced response of Israeli Defense Forces to threats by Hamas, causing untold death and destruction among the innocent within Palestine is a continuing problem. As such, in light of the ongoing discord between Israeli and Palestinian inhabitants of the State of Israel and in occupied Palestine, we condemn the recent actions of the Israeli Defense Forces of the State of Israel for its excessive use of force in and around the Al Aqsa Mosque, beginning on April 13, 2021, and its heavy-handed response to rockets subsequently fired by Hamas from Gaza, which response caused an unconscionable civilian death toll. We also condemn any unlawful incursion of illegal settlements into Palestinian neighborhoods such as that of Sheikh Jarrah, and especially into occupied Palestine, in transgression of established treaties and laws, as expansionist, colonialist, and needlessly adversarial. This is a highly nuanced situation, but there are certain simple aspects that emerge with careful analysis. It is our position that Israel, as the more powerful entity in this conflict, must exercise restraint and practice de-escalation toward its Palestinian brethren, both in honor of their shared Abrahamic heritage, and in honor of the principle of a measured response. Israel must also respect Palestinian sovereignty and established borders. Israel must show respect toward the human dignity and human rights of all, especially the Palestinians, balanced with the goal of peace and security. Without attention to justice and human rights, there can be no expectation of peace.

Qualifying statements of admonition, condemning actions and not people or religions or nations

Recognizing the right of both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine to exist is an important first step in discouraging uncritical and overly emotional responses to such a statement of condemnation of actions, and to promoting actual lasting progress toward peace. In making this statement, we do not wish to be misconstrued as endorsing any form of violence by Hamas, or any other extremist group. We seek to promote peace everywhere, and especially between religions and ethnicities as closely related as the Abrahamic faiths, and the specific peoples of the Holy Land. Bearing in mind the shared heritage of the Abrahamic Faiths, as well as that of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, along with the conditions of amity and relatively peaceful coexistence that existed between Jews and Palestinians prior to the early 20th century, the IRTPJ supports what is commonly called a Two State Solution, with Palestinians having full sovereignty over their state. Additionally, we wish to emphasize the need to issue condemnation of actions alone, while refraining from condemning an entire nation, ethnicity, or

religion. Without this clarification, it is far too easy for people to misconstrue meaning and intent, and to become further entrenched in their positions, intransigent in the process of peacemaking.

We support the right to life and safety of all Palestinians, the same as we do of Israelis. Were Israel to adopt a more brotherly and egalitarian stance toward Palestine, such gesture would go a long way in improving its relationship with other nations in the Middle East and the world. Israel—as the secular embodiment and hereditary recipient of the ancient command to the Jewish people to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”—has a responsibility to lead the way in terms of morality and compassion and treatment of the sojourner, as well as fellow children of Abraham. We admonish and encourage Israel to once again lead the way in righteousness and justice.

Signed on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Institute for Religious Tolerance, Peace and Justice,



L. Arik Greenberg, Ph.D., President

June 2, 2021