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The Siege on Gaza Continues

By Nadia Hijab

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator

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The Goldstone Report has rightly focused international attention on the crimes committed during Israel's offensive against Gaza in December-January this year. Even if the United States quashes it at the United Nations Security Council - where it is likely to go now that the Human Rights Council has adopted it - the report will make human rights violators think twice.

But it doesn't end the Israeli siege of Gaza. The siege, which began years ago, tightened to an almost total lockdown in June 2007 and continues to this day. It is not just a war crime. As the Goldstone Report put it, depriving the Gaza Palestinians of their means of sustenance, employment, housing and water, freedom of movement, and access to a court of law and an effective remedy, could amount to persecution, and a competent court could find "that crimes against humanity have been committed."

And yet, the siege continues.

While Israel bears direct responsibility for the persecution of the Gaza Palestinians, many others are complicit. Most complicit is the Obama Administration, which has done nothing to end the siege, and has no visible plans to do so - notwithstanding this week's remarks by National Security Advisor Jim Jones that "we do not accept the continuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza."

Alongside the United States, European and other governments have a responsibility to uphold the Geneva Conventions and their inaction makes them complicit. Indeed, former British minister

Clare Short and the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza have recently taken legal action against the European Union for not suspending its trade agreement with Israel, as required by the human rights provisions of Article 2.

Other accomplices: The Palestinian Authority, transfixed by its feud with Hamas, turns a deaf ear to repeated United Nations alarms about the malnutrition of Palestinian children, dying patients, erupting sewage facilities, and eroding water systems.

And Egypt, which briefly opens and then shuts its Rafah border with Gaza, partly because of its agreements with Israel and the international community and partly for political considerations that include keeping up the pressure on Hamas.

And Hamas, which remains determined to maintain its hold on authority - because it won a majority in parliamentary elections, to uphold the spirit of Palestinian resistance, and for political gain.

Egypt, which is brokering Fatah-Hamas reconciliation talks, may reopen the Rafah border once a deal is cemented and the P.A. can staff the border under the aegis of international observers. However, although the reconciliation document has been signed by Fatah and agreed by Hamas according to some of its senior representatives, the process has hit a snag, partly due to the fallout from Mahmoud Abbas' initial decision to postpone consideration of the Goldstone Report.

And the Palestinians of Gaza suffer under Israel's siege.

This has left it to people from around the world to try to break the siege themselves. Three separate initiatives are scheduled to converge on Gaza in the next few months: the Free Gaza Movement, the Viva Palestina convoy, and the Gaza Freedom March.

The Free Gaza Movement, launched in 2006 by Palestinian and international volunteers, has challenged the siege by sea. In 2008, lawyers, journalists, academics, and others sailed five times to Gaza carrying medical and other supplies. But Israel rammed the sixth ship and kidnapped and briefly imprisoned the passengers on the eighth. Undeterred, the Free Gaza Movement is raising money for a flotilla of passenger and cargo ships to set sail soon.

Viva Palestina volunteers have challenged the siege by land, organizing two convoys of humanitarian goods in February and July. Another convoy sets off on December 5, picking up volunteers in London and Istanbul.

The Gaza Freedom March involves hundreds of international activists who plan to cross the border at Rafah and to march alongside the Gaza Palestinians on December 31st, aiming to reach the border with Israel.

Enthusiasm for the march in Gaza is understandably high, given the Strip's isolation, with thousands reportedly planning to march with the internationals. Among other things, youth groups from around Gaza are planning dance, theatre and music shows to welcome the visitors. University student unions hope to strike for the day to bring out the numbers, and women's groups are also aiming to mobilize their members.

All of these international volunteers have been speaking out when they get back home and pushing for change in their own government's policies that allow Israel to keep its siege in place. Perhaps their sustained efforts will finally shame their leaders into action to end the persecution of the

Palestinians.

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator. Nadia Hijab, is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Palestine Studies. This commentary was syndicated and distributed by [Agence Global](#). The Institute has produced authoritative studies on Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1963. Its flagship Journal of Palestine Studies is published by the University of California Press. Click [here](#) to contact Nadia Hijab.



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