



## **Press statement**

**28 October 2023**

---

### **Call for an End to the Bombardment of Gaza**

Defend our Democracy reiterates the call of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people across the globe for an immediate end to Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

We lend our voice to that of the United Nations' Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, calling for humanitarian aid – food, water, medicine and fuel – to be allowed into the Gaza Strip immediately and on the scale that is required.

It is simply unconscionable that the United Nations Security Council could not come to an agreement on an issue as fundamental and human as getting in aid to ordinary civilians.

Watching the distressing visuals on our television screens and on social media daily, we are appalled at Israel's bombardment, for over two weeks, of hospitals, one of the oldest churches in the world, mosques, shopping centres and residential buildings in Palestine.

As it stands, 7000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's aerial bombing of the Gaza Strip and in recent raids in the West Bank. Of this disturbing number, some 2900 are children!

In two weeks, Israel has arrested some 5000 people, doubling the number of Palestinians in Israeli prisons.

Defend our Democracy condemns the racist rhetoric of some Israeli officials, who have dehumanised Palestinians by calling them 'animals'. We have only to look into our past - at Rwanda, Bosnia, and at the Holocaust itself - to realise how dehumanisation paves the way for genocide.

We reiterate the statement of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) on 18 October 2023:

“South Africa condemns in the strongest possible terms the killing of civilians in Palestine and Israel. The targeting of civilians in armed conflicts is in violation of International Humanitarian Law and Geneva Conventions.

“Just as the attack by Hamas on civilians in Israel was abhorrent, there are no words to fully express South Africa's condemnation of Israel's bombing of the Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital on 17 October... The targeting of a hospital considered a safe haven under International Humanitarian Law is a war crime.”

1400 Israelis were killed by Hamas in its attack on 7 October 2023 at military bases in Israel, at several kibbutzim and at a festival taking place nearby. 200 Israeli civilians and soldiers were taken hostage, and remain captive within the Gaza Strip, with four hostages having been released in the last few days.

South Africa will mark 30 years of democracy in 2024. It is not so long ago that the vast majority of people here, lived under apartheid, occupation and colonialism. We believe that



the first step to a just peace and negotiated settlement for both Palestinians and Israelis is an end to Israel's apartheid policies, occupation and settler colonialism.

As the Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana wrote recently, "Freedom, justice and peace are indivisible concepts. What is just for one people should be just also for the other people. What is unjust for the one is unjust also for the other. The measure of freedom and liberty for one should be the same measure of freedom and liberty for the other. Fear, insecurity and military repression is no recipe for lasting peace. There should be no compromise on the fundamental demand for a just peace with dignity and security for both Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians – lasting peace with security for all."

In its recent statement on the issue, the South African Hindu Maha Sabha reflected similarly, stating, "We pray for peace but understand that there can be no lasting peace without justice. Our own history taught us that."

We are reminded of the words of former President Nelson Mandela in December 1997:

"Having achieved our own freedom, we can fall into the trap of washing our hands off difficulties that others face. Yet we would be less than human if we did so.

It behoves all South Africans, themselves erstwhile beneficiaries of generous international support, to stand up and be counted among those contributing actively to the cause of freedom and justice.

"Even during the days of negotiations, our own experience taught us that the pursuit of human fraternity and equality - irrespective of race or religion - should stand at the centre of our peaceful endeavours. The choice is not between freedom and justice, on the one hand, and their opposite, on the other. Peace and prosperity; tranquillity and security are only possible if these are enjoyed by all without discrimination.

"...We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians; without the resolution of conflicts in East Timor, the Sudan and other parts of the world."

--

**Issued by Defend our Democracy**

***To endorse this statement, click here: <https://forms.gle/UjfPEwnqqhcWa3Av8>***

---

**Supported by:**

Active Citizens Movement

Advice Desk for the Abused

Ahmed Kathrada Foundation



ASRI NPC (Auwal Socio-Economic Research Institute)

Botsotso

Centre for Good Governance and Social Justice NPC

Congress of Business and Economics

Defend our Democracy

Faith Action South Africa

Gandhi Development Trust

Impact4Good

International Movement for Tamil Culture (SA)

Johannesburg Against Injustice

June and Andrew Mlangeni Foundation

Khulumani Support Group

Krishna Rabilal Foundation

Letsema Centre for Development and Democracy

Mayibuye

Meenakshi Sundareswara Koil - Lenasia South

Mfidikwe Bokamoso Community Development Forum

Msunduzi Association of Residents Ratepayers and Civics

Muslim Judicial Council (SA)

National Association of School Governing Bodies

Progressive Health Forum

Progressive Tamil Movement

Project O

Right2Know

South African Council of Churches

Shito-ryu Karatedo Institute

South African Communist Party

South African Conversations



South Durban Community Environmental Alliance

South African Hindu Maha Sabha

Strategic Dialogue Group

The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa

Westside Park Community Crisis Committee

#UniteBehind

---

**For media enquiries, contact:**

**Zaakirah Vadi**

**Defend our Democracy**

**076 243 1185**