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TO:/A:H.E. Ambassador Martin Ihoeghian Uhomobhi
President of the Human Rights Council, OHCHR**FAX NO.:**

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Mission permanente d'Israël
auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies
et des Organisations Internationales à Genève

משלחת ישראל
ליד משרד האומות המאוחדות
והארגונים הבינלאומיים בג'נבה

H.E. Ambassador Martin Ihoeghian Uhomobhi
President of the Human Rights Council
Office of the High Commissioner for Human
Rights
Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10

7 January 2009

Excellency,

I would like to draw your attention to the sequence of events during the past two weeks that led to the Operation "Cast Lead" against Hamas and affiliated Palestinian terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip. The information I am providing in this letter accurately reflects the Israeli Government's perspective on the events. Hopefully it will dispel the vast amounts of misinformation which have been circulating in recent days.

On Christmas day, the situation of "calm" declared by Hamas six months earlier was violated by more than 80 rockets fired towards the south of Israel. This was the peak of an ongoing state of events, during which more than 8,000 projectiles have targeted Israeli cities since the year 2000. On Saturday, 27 of December 2008, Israel decided to exercise its legitimate right of self-defense under international Law, by launching Operation "Cast Lead" to protect the citizens of southern Israel, who were being subjected to daily Hamas rocket and mortar fire.

It should be noted that Israel has completely withdrew all soldiers and citizens from the Gaza Strip. Since Hamas violently took power in Gaza, it has renounced all previous Palestinian agreements with Israel, has applied a regime of violent oppression towards the Gaza citizens, and carried out constant offenses against the Israeli residents in Sderot, the Negev, and other areas bordering Gaza. The Iranian backed, trained and armed Hamas, is an extremist Jihadist group, recognized by many states as a terrorist organization. Israel's aim in the Operation "Cast Lead" is to protect its citizens, to weaken the ability of the Hamas to terrorize Southern Israel and to bring a new security realm to the region.

Not only that Hamas used the period of calm to build up its arsenal to attack Israeli civilians, it has every intention of continuing to do so. Dozens of Kassam and Grad (Katyusha) rockets are fired daily at an ever-expanding range of towns and cities in Southern Israel. Only yesterday, one of the rockets reached the city of Gedera, 45 km from the Gaza strip. Almost a million Israeli civilians live within the range of these rockets. Constant air raid sirens mean that the entire south of Israel looks like one huge ghost town. Classes at all schools in the south of Israel have been completely suspended. Businesses are shut down, adding more pressure on the population.

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No democratic country in the world would allow its sovereignty to be violated and its citizens to be subjected to terror attacks on a daily basis. Israel only embarked on this operation after it had exhausted every other possibility. For years, in the face of constant terror attacks from Gaza, Israel acted with restraint and made every attempt to avoid confrontation.

I would like you to keep in mind that the humanitarian situation of innocent Palestinian civilians in Gaza is also a major source of concern for Israel. The Palestinians are not our enemies, they are our neighbors. We will continue to conduct the military activities against Hamas terrorists, while applying the highest moral standards towards the Palestinian civilian population. Last week, for instance, Palestinian children, who were accidentally injured by Hamas fire, received treatment in Schneider Hospital in Petah Tiqva. Shipments of food and aid are constantly allowed into Gaza, despite the danger Hamas attacks pose to the carriers of these humanitarian shipments by the direct and deliberate targeting of the crossings. Those shipments include food, WHO medical equipment, Red Cross relief equipment, UNRWA donations, Palestinian private sector trucks, as well as donations from European and Arab countries.

While Israel is making every possible effort to minimize the loss of innocent civilians in Gaza, Hamas is exclusively and indiscriminately targeting civilian institutions such as schools, kindergartens, shopping centers and houses inside Israel. Furthermore, Hamas uses its own population as human shields, calling upon the residents of Gaza to ignore the warnings from Israel to evacuate sensitive locations. The terrorists attempt to hamper the effective distribution of aid, in order to intensify the international visibility of a self-made crisis.

The Israeli people want to live in peace with their Palestinian neighbors. This can be achieved only through direct bilateral negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian government, headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, to fulfill the two states vision. At the same time, it is the duty of the Government of Israel to provide security to its citizens.

Please accept, Excellency, the continued assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Aharon Leshno Yaar
Ambassador
Permanent Representative