

Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) Joins Israel's "Dirty Media War": Some key facts to keep in mind when evaluating CJC statements

At 2pm today, as many of you know, the CJC is organizing a press conference in this building. This hand-out provides some basic facts that need to inform any credible consideration of CJC statements regarding the ongoing Israeli military assault on Gaza and its critics. (1) Israel is presently waging a war against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. (2) The Israeli government and its close associates have formally established a propaganda system which has for many months been preparing justifications for this assault and means of marginalizing its critics. And (3) the CJC is connected, in effect and in institutional fact, to the institutions waging Israel's "dirty media war."

In light of these facts, the CJC is no moral position to smear the critics of the brutal Israeli attacks it is helping to justify. Instead, its officials are the ones who should be forced to answer for their conduct. A brief presentation of the above points follows (continued, with citations, on reverse side).

(1) Israel is presently waging a war against the civilian population of the Gaza Strip

Final authorization for the Israeli assault on Gaza ("Operation Cast Lead") was given to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) the morning of Friday December 26, 2008.¹ That day, Major General Amiram Levin (res.) spoke on IDF Radio regarding Israeli military doctrine for Gaza. "The whole issue of fighting against and bringing down the Hamas regime is a mistake and very difficult to achieve," said Levin. "What we have to do is act systematically with the aim of punishing all the organizations that are firing the rockets and mortars, *as well as the civilians who are enabling them to fire and hide.*"² This is in line with earlier threats made by General Gadi Eisenkot, the head of IDF Northern Command, regarding Lebanon: "We will wield disproportionate power against every village from which shorts are fired on Israel, and cause immense damage and destruction"; "*From our perspective, these are military bases.*"³

Palestinians in Gaza are being killed in the hundreds, the infrastructure they require to survive mercilessly destroyed, by IDF forces following up on such threats (this is terrorism, not "deterrence").

(2) The Israeli government and its close associates have formally established a propaganda system which has been planning Gaza invasion PR for months

Anshel Pfeffer, a regular writer for the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, explains: "The Gaza attack is the first major demonstration of Israel's total overhaul of its 'hasbara' [bluntly translated, 'propaganda'] operation following the Second Lebanon War. While the military aspects of the operation were meticulously planned, a new forum of press advisers was also established which has been working for the past six months on a PR strategy specifically geared to dealing with the media during warfare in Gaza."⁴ "Ministers have been ordered by the Cabinet Secretary not to give interviews with authorisation so as not to repeat the PR disaster of a year ago, when deputy defense minister Matan Vilnai threatened the Palestinians with a 'holocaust.'"⁵

In a recent article for *Ha'aretz* on the operation of this Israeli wartime diplomacy system, Pfeffer quotes "a former government media advisor, now making a killing in the private sector and for obvious reasons insisting on anonymity."⁶ The source explains: "It doesn't matter if you think you can justify an operation in which civilians are killed, it will always look bad and trying to be a nice guy with hasbara is pointless, nice guys lose. *We have to be devious and make up convincing stories or buy them out. War is dirty and so is the media war.*"⁷

~ SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR INFO. ON DIRECT CJC INVOLVEMENT AND SOURCES ~

Israel's "dirty media war" has involved barring foreign journalists from entering Gaza – Israel has also been continuously accused of targeting journalists operating within the Strip⁸ – while carefully filtering messages through its established PR system.

(3) The CJC is connected, in effect and in institutional fact, to the institutions waging Israel's "dirty media war"

The propaganda (to use their euphemism, "hasbara") system designed to provide a cover for Israeli atrocities is described as follows by *Ha'aretz's* Pfeffer: "As part of the lessons from the Second Lebanon War, a national information directorate has been set up in the Prime Minister's office and there is a coordinated media strategy between all government agencies, the IDF, Israel's diplomatic missions, the Jewish Agency and private pro-Israel organizations."⁹

The Canadian Jewish Congress, like the Canada-Israel Committee, operates under the direct control of the Jewish Agency -affiliated United Israel Appeal Federations Canada (UIAFC). Institutionally, the connection between the CJC and Israel's dirty media war appears to be direct.

And indeed, the CJC has uncritically parroted IDF justifications for Israeli crimes. Consider just one example: Israeli attacks on Palestinian educational facilities.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) describes some of these attacks:

On 27 December, Human Rights Watch reported that an Israeli air-to-ground missile struck a group of students leaving the Gaza Training College, adjacent to the headquarters of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in downtown Gaza City, killing eight students and wounding 19 others. Two days later, on 29 December 2008, Israel bombed the Islamic University of Gaza, destroying the science laboratory block and destroying or damaging other blocks of buildings, including the library. Although Israel has claimed that the science laboratory facilities were used as 'a research and development center for Hamas weapons,' this claim has been denied by officials of the Islamic University, and according to the New York Times of January 1, 2009, Israel has not produced any evidence for its claim. On January 3, the Israeli air force destroyed the American International School, and, on January 6, 30 people were killed and 55 injured when Israeli artillery shells landed outside a United Nations-run school in Gaza.¹⁰

The CJC has condemned none of these crimes, and has scandalously described the December 29 bombing of the Islamic University as follows: "...the Israel Defense Forces destroyed a Hamas weapons lab housed in a university building in Gaza..."¹¹ – this in the absence of any evidence, absent any criticism of IDF brutality, and in direct support of Israeli military targeting of Palestinian civilian centres.

**The CJC is in no moral position to criticize anyone.
CJC officials have shown no concern for the massacre of Palestinians
or the destruction of Palestinian civilian infrastructure, and they are the ones who
should be forced to answer for supporting Israeli crimes against humanity.**

Notes:

¹ Barak Ravid, "Disinformation, secrecy and lies: How the Gaza offensive came about," December 31 2008, Ha'aretz Online.

² "Israeli general says Hamas must not be the only target in Gaza; Text of report by IDF Radio on 26 December," December 26 2008, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

³ Nicholas Kimbrell, "War of words between Israel, Lebanon escalated in 2008," December 31 2008, The Daily Star.

⁴ Anshel Pfeffer, "Israel claims success in the PR war," January 2 2009, The Jewish Chronicle.

⁵ Pfeffer, "Israel claims success in the PR war."

⁶ Anshel Pfeffer, "Jerusalem & Babylon / The true meaning of hasbara," January 8 2009, Ha'aretz Online.

⁷ Pfeffer, "Jerusalem & Babylon / The true meaning of hasbara."

⁸ See, eg., last Sunday's Organization of Asia Pacific News Agencies (OANA) allegations, reported among other places in "Xinhua world news summary," January 11 2009, Xinhua News Agency.

⁹ Pfeffer, "Jerusalem & Babylon / The true meaning of hasbara."

¹⁰ "Statement on the Gaza conflict," January 6 2009, caut.ca

¹¹ "Ryan undermines apology ...," January 8 2009, cjc.ca.