

BAY AREA WOMEN IN BLACK

Presentation To Senator Barbara Boxer and Senator Dianne Feinstein

INTRODUCTION

Barbara Zoloth

Our primary focus today is military aid that the U.S. gives to Israel. BAWIB is a group of Jews and allies who stand against militaristic and fundamentalist leadership in all countries, including our own. We are committed to nonviolent resistance against injustice, believing that all people have the right to security, home, education, justice, and freedom. Our central focus is working non-violently to end the Israeli Occupation which we believe is a violation of human rights and international law. Only a just resolution of this conflict can bring peace and security for Israelis, Palestinians, and the whole Middle East community. We challenge the key role of the United States government in supporting this Occupation through financial and military aid. We believe this aid increases militarism in the Middle East and magnifies the threat to global security.

US military aid to Israel is being used to inflict harm on Palestinians in ways that are fundamentally at odds with our values and with the values of this country. We're here today to ask that the Senator support all efforts to reduce and/or restrict this aid until and unless that harm that is reduced.

According to U.S. law, countries that commit human rights abuses with U.S. aid are to be sanctioned, and aid is to be cut off. Israel has been the largest annual recipient of direct U.S. economic and military assistance since 1976. Over the past decade, U.S. military aid to Israel increased yearly while economic aid was phased out. A condition of our military aid to Israel requires that it be used to purchase military weapons and equipment from U.S. companies. The U.S. Arms Export Control Act stipulates that countries purchasing or receiving U.S. weapons cannot use them against civilians and must restrict their usage to "internal security" and "legitimate self defense". We believe that this law has been significantly and repeatedly violated.

The "security fence" is a wall that keeps Palestinians confined, prevents them from reaching their crops, getting to their jobs, attending school, being with their families. The "checkpoints" are military installations that arbitrarily and abusively restrict mobility and subject Palestinians to arbitrary delays, often resulting in great physical suffering and sometimes death. Caterpillar bulldozers, armed with U.S. munitions, demolish homes, destroy infrastructure and deprive Palestinians of their livelihood. The multiple and repeated military attacks on Gaza have inflicted untold suffering, not just from the direct devastation caused by the bombings, but also by the targeted and intentional destruction of infrastructure (schools, power plants, homes, factories).

We want aid given in our name to reflect our values—American values. The U.S. must not support the oppression and subjugation of a people, and we most certainly must not continue to finance that oppression.

Effects on Families and Children in Gaza and the West Bank

Catherine Larsen

My name is Catherine Larsen. I am a mother and grandmother. I am appalled at the destruction in Gaza and in the West Bank. According to the Middle East Children's Alliance, more than 300 children were killed in the December-January attacks on Gaza. Tens of thousands of children were injured, many now have permanent disabilities with little chance of getting the prostheses, rehabilitation services and medical care they will need in the future. Israel's use of DIME (Dense Inert Metal Explosive) weapons and white phosphorous on the civilian population of Gaza is nearly certain to cause a major cancer epidemic in the coming years. Babies whose mothers were pregnant during the attacks on Gaza are being born with birth defects.

Meanwhile, so many children are still homeless and deprived of food, clean water, healthcare and education because of Israel's siege. Thousands witnessed firsthand the deaths of parents, siblings and friends. Essentially every child and family in Gaza has been traumatized.

The continued occupation of the West Bank also takes a tremendous toll on children, with killing, imprisonment, land takeover, unrestrained settler violence, and the constant disruption of education, healthcare and all aspects of daily life.

As it stands now, there is no future for children and families in Gaza and the West Bank. A paradigm shift is needed. The United States should take an active part in bringing peace and justice to the Middle East by ending military aid to Israel

Health of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank

Jean Pauline

Israel's blockade of Gaza, plus the immense devastation caused by its assault on Gaza in December/January 2008/09, have left the people, particularly the children, with a specter of widespread starvation. Using weapons received from the U.S., Israel left the Gazans without proper sewage since all the sewage pipes and the sewage treatment plant were destroyed. They were left as well with no fuel for heating or cooking and very scarce medical facilities, since almost all ambulances, health centers and hospitals were destroyed or irreparably damaged. Also, much of the agricultural land was destroyed.

According to a UNICEF report, "Conditions in the occupied territories have rarely been worse for Palestinian children." One in ten children suffers from stunted growth due to compromised health, poor diet and nutrition, 50% of them are anemic and 75% under five suffer from a vitamin A deficiency. Over half of all households are eating only one meal a day, leaving 9.3% of the children under 5 acutely malnourished and a further 13.2% chronically malnourished. Also, the rate of anemia is rising in pregnant women.

Many children even pass out at school because the water is highly saline and contaminated, causing various water-borne diseases. Why is clean water in such short supply? Because the Israeli military government uses 75% of the water from the Palestinian aquifer and systematically destroys Palestinian water-treatment facilities.

The Israeli occupation has caused the Palestinians to undergo an epidemiological transition in which cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes and cancer have overtaken infectious diseases as the main causes of illness and death. And today, Palestinian children and adults are reported to have the highest number of post-traumatic stress disorder of any people in the world.

Given all these negative statistics, it is time for the United States to rethink its policy of annually sending \$3 billion of military aid to Israel.

Effects of U.S. Military Aid to Israel on the Economic Status of Palestinian Women

Judith Berlowitz

With the large numbers of Palestinian men deported, ill, imprisoned, disabled, or murdered by Israeli forces, women have been forced to become the family breadwinners. But living in occupied lands, and treated as colonial subjects, they bear the dual stigma of being women and of not being Jewish. So it is very difficult for Palestinian women to work inside Israel, even if they are well-educated and hold professional credentials. In many cases they must wait for hours in line to pass through checkpoints to go to work (if they are able to obtain work permits), with almost no childcare available at home. Palestinian women who work both inside Israel and on Israeli businesses on confiscated Palestinian land are paid about 1/3 of the minimum wage paid to Israeli workers, and they work in conditions similar to sweatshops in China or *maquilas* on the U.S.-Mexican border. Women are protected by international laws, and Israel is in constant violation of these laws through the military occupation of Palestinian lands.

Agriculture is now carried out overwhelmingly by Palestinian women, and it has become increasingly difficult. The Israeli military's systematic destruction of orchards, animal pens, and water sources is one type of obstacle to agriculture. Another, more constant obstacle is the ever-growing "security" wall, which separates women's homes from their fields. These things are all made possible with funds and weapons from U.S. military aid. Other cottage industries carried out by women earn some support from U.N. organizations, which are largely funded by the U.S. But these small businesses are often targets of the Israeli military.

Ending U.S. military aid to Israel would do much to return economic autonomy to the Palestinian people, particularly the women.

Impact of Israeli Occupation on Education in Palestine

Sharon Duggan

Education is a fundamental human right, basic to freedom and aspirations, and is guaranteed by international laws. These laws mandate Israel, as an occupying power, to ensure safe access to free education at the primary and secondary levels and to technical education.

Despite these mandates, Israel refuses to respect the rights of Palestinian students. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have control over curriculum, textbooks, student admission, and hiring and firing of faculty, at every educational institution in the occupied territories. This military presence impedes the right of Palestinian children to access their schools and to obtain the quality of education necessary to become viable members of society. Obstacles faced by Palestinian students include separation walls, humiliating checkpoints, and school closures. The waiting time at a checkpoint can vary from a couple of minutes to several hours, and students spend more time traveling to and from schools than learning in the classrooms. Palestinian students and teachers have been shot at or arrested on their way to school. School schedules are interrupted, student and teacher attendance rates are low, and test scores in core subjects such as mathematics and Arabic and English are down.

With little hope for education offered the average child, the Palestinians attempted to respond by implementing home schooling. Israel countered by outlawing all forms of Palestinian informal education. The ongoing occupation and Israeli militarism are causing high levels of psychological distress in children, such as withdrawal, sleeplessness, nightmares, aggressiveness, and poor concentration.

The Israeli system of military occupation, supported by U.S. aid, prevents Palestinian students from accessing their education, in violation of recognized international law. It deprives Palestinians of a personal and social transformative tool to improve their individual lives and society.