



PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

20 May 2021

4000 Rockets Launched From Gaza Toward Israel's Cities

Hamas continues to indiscriminately target civilian populations in Israel while using their own civilians as human shields. Their rockets have killed Israeli Arabs and citizens of Thailand and India who were residing in Israel. In addition, Hamas built an extensive underground tunnel network beneath civilian areas. This network allowed them, until recently, to stock weapons, missiles, command posts, communication centres, and fighters, as well as to shoot from underground.

The origin of this escalation lies in the cancellation of the Palestinian elections by the Palestinian Authority. Hamas was certain that it would gain power in these elections. When they were cancelled, Hamas then sought to use events surrounding Jerusalem Day and Sheikh Jarrah to incite riots and violence in order to advance their political goals.

Israel did not seek this conflict, and did everything in its power to deescalate potential tensions around Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Israel delayed the court proceedings on Sheikh Jarrah, rerouted the traditional Jerusalem Day parade, and restricted the entry of Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount.

Despite all of these measures, the propaganda and incitement continued. Ultimately, Hamas launched unprecedented rocket fire on Jerusalem on Jerusalem Day (10.5.21). Hamas and Islamic Jihad have since fired 4000 rockets at Israel. Approximately one quarter of these rockets have misfired and fallen in Gaza itself, causing Palestinian casualties.

Israel is grappling with a radical Islamic terrorist organisation that has controlled a strip of territory on its border since 2007, when Hamas took over Gaza by force, refusing to accept the Palestinian Authority's election results. Israel is working to degrade their terrorist capabilities and deter their will to fight, while doing its utmost to avoid civilian casualties and restore calm quickly.

Israel is monitoring the humanitarian situation, and we are in constant contact with aid organisations. We are aware of the difficulties and are doing everything possible to allow the passage of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

On 18 May 2021 as Israel was transferring humanitarian aid to Gaza, Hamas launched mortar shells on the trucks as they were crossing the border. The following day, on 19 May 2021, another attempt was made to transfer humanitarian aid to Gaza, and Hamas again fired at the border crossings as the trucks were passing through.

Israel is going to unprecedented lengths to prevent civilian casualties and collateral damage by targeting terrorist sites with the greatest possible precision. Criticizing Israel is therefore hugely damaging to all democracies fighting against similar radical forces, because it implies that democracies cannot properly protect themselves. It serves to encourage and support terrorists, which is detrimental to all those who want peace and a better future.

Those who should be criticized are the perpetrators of double war crimes, who are hiding behind civilians while firing on civilians. To support Israel and its counterterrorism efforts is to support our common security and shared interests in the Middle East.

Please see attached for further information and official quotes from H.E. Ran Yaakoby Ambassador of Israel to New Zealand and Non-Resident Ambassador to Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands, together with a briefing from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel Gabi Ashkenazi.