

# Haiti Hypocrisy Hides Another War Crime in Gaza

Thursday, 28 January 2010

Last Updated Thursday, 28 January 2010

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(source: Palestine Chronicle) The Deluge in Gaza didn't result merely from flash flooding. (Photo: Saddy Alassar)

The human catastrophe gripping Haiti since a 7.0-magnitude earthquake devastated that nation on January 12 rightfully dominated nearly every newscast for a week. With devastation of such unimaginable proportions, there are the riveting stories of despair and courage, along with a relatively new and hideous phenomenon: politicization of the disaster and its aftermath.

Media opportunists have reached new depths of hypocrisy and ineptitude in covering the tragedy. Mainstream television networks and newspapers touted the overwhelming US military response, as well as other countries that were among the first to reach the victims in Haiti, including Israel.

Conspicuously absent from the kudos list were two of the first responders, Cuba and Venezuela.

On January 13, one day after the quake, a C-130 transport plane was dispatched to Port-au Prince loaded with supplies, food and doctors. To date, six massive shipments from Venezuela have reached Haiti, totaling 5,000 metric tons of foodstuffs, as well as humanitarian aid teams and heavy machinery for reconstruction. Additionally, President Hugo Chavez pledged that his country will provide Haiti with free gasoline and diesel.

Cuba has maintained approximately 400 doctors who provide free medical services throughout Haitian communities for the last several years. Therefore, Cuban medical teams were first on the scene to set up two emergency hospitals. A group of 38 Haitians currently completing medical internships in Cuba returned to their homeland to assist in the relief efforts, along with an additional three Cuban surgical teams. The Associated Press reported on January 20 that Ena Zizi, a 69 year-old pulled from the rubble after a week, was taken to the Cuban hospital for treatment. Reportedly, Cuban teams are working 18-hour shifts in order to save as many of the injured as possible.

Meanwhile, in the most poignant outpouring of compassion for the Haitian people, Palestinians—themselves no strangers to widespread death and destruction—lined up at the Red Cross headquarters in Gaza to donate toiletries, toys, sweets and blankets. Unfortunately, none of the goods will be shipped to Haiti due to the Israeli siege. Some Gazans were able to donate money, apparently the only commodity allowed to leave the Strip.

While ignoring the contributions of political and ideological rivals, American media gave Israel special recognition at every turn. The field hospital set up by the Israeli army warranted an entire segment of NBC's nightly newscast on January 19. One senior Israeli officer stated "If we save one life, it's as if we save the whole world."

So let us get this straight: it is imperative to give Israelis singular credit in saving Haitian children, while ignoring the fact that last year's assault on Gaza killed hundreds of children and maimed thousands more, not to mention the 360 Lebanese children slaughtered during Israel's 2006 offensive.

With the American media locked in fierce competition as to who could lavish the most praise on the Israeli military for saving Haiti, another disaster was brewing in Gaza. Israeli officials opened the Al-Wadi dam east of Gaza in the wake of torrential rainfall in the region, flooding the refugee camp of Al-Nusseirat, Johr al-Deek village and al-Mughraqa, a suburb of Gaza City. Villagers provided eyewitness accounts that Israeli forces stationed in the area opened the dam without warning and without coordination with Palestinian civil agencies. Media outlets from Brunei to China to Iran reported the disaster.

According to China's Xinhua news agency, Israel had constructed the dam to hoard rain water, depriving Gazan farms and villages of this precious resource for years. As the dam was opened, houses that had been built along the dried-up ditch were inundated with flood waters, displacing approximately 100 Gazan families and drowning cattle and poultry. Palestinian Civil Defense Chief Yousef al-Zahar stated "what happened was a deliberate act by Israel."

Israeli officials were quick to deny opening any dams, or that a dam even existed in the area. Israel's Eshkol regional council bordering Gaza dismissed the claims as "silly," maintaining they knew nothing of such a dam.

Pro-Israeli bloggers took up the cries of "water libel," adding that there were no coordinates on any map indicating the presence of a dam and that Palestinians had made up the whole story. Of course, the Israelis would do well not to acknowledge the presence of such a dam, else admit to years of denying water to Gazan farmers.

However, pictures show that the deluge in Gaza could not have resulted merely from flash flooding. According to the Israeli Meteorological Service, up to five inches of rain fell in the area. The Gaza valley where the floods occurred runs nearly five miles from its eastern border with the Jewish state, descending to the Mediterranean Sea. The downgrade would allow for more severe flooding, but not to the levels seen in Gaza. Therefore, some other factor had to contribute to such massive amounts of water rushing into the area, i.e. Israel's opening of the Al-Wadi dam.

Another instance of Israel's disregard for environmental consequences— even more sinister given what happened in Haiti— took place in August 2009. Israel National News reported that tremors were created in the southern Negev in a joint project with the University of Hawaii and funded by the US Department of Defense. In the experiment, Israelis detonated 80 tons of explosive material to simulate the intensity of a magnitude 3.0 earthquake. Supposedly, this will help scientists improve seismological and acoustic readings to predict future earthquakes. It was not explained why the US Department of Defense was involved.

The tragedies of Haiti and Gaza are compounded by mainstream media's exploitation of millions of innocent people in order to promote the US and Israel's masquerade as benevolent societies. Good works done by governments at odds with the US-Israeli agenda are ignored, maintaining contempt for the very people who should be praised. And once again, while the world's attention is elsewhere, Israel takes the opportunity to attack Palestinian lives and livelihoods, making a bleak existence even more unbearable.

- Tammy Obeidallah contributed this article to PalestineChronicle.com.