

May 2021

Israel has the right to defend its citizens against terror

For eleven days in May, Israeli civilians were under constant rocket fire by Hamas and other terrorist organizations in Gaza.

The conflict began with Hamas's frustration over the decision of the Palestinian administration to postpone the elections through which Hamas hoped to get into power. This frustration soon turned into incitement to violence on the Temple Mount, and later on into firing of over 4000 rockets from Gaza Strip to Israeli cities, including the capital, Jerusalem.

Millions of people spent the nights in shelters; over a million kids were unable to go to school in order to remain safe. Innocent civilians were killed and injured.

No country would tolerate such extreme aggression against its own citizens and sovereignty. It is not just a question of Israel's security but also that of the stability and well-being of the whole region. The conflict is not religious, nor is it a conflict between "Israelis" and "Palestinians". The conflict is between the State of Israel and a terrorist organization.

Hamas, who is behind the recent attacks, is a murderous terrorist organization that is promoting the same kind of Islamist extremism that the Middle East has experienced under ISIS. Hamas has been acknowledged as a terrorist organization by many countries in the world, including the EU.

Hamas is committing double war crimes by firing its rockets from the midst of its own Palestinian civilian population towards Israeli civilian population. A quarter of these rockets have fallen in its own territory, causing severe casualties and property damage on its own side.

Every state has the right and duty to protect its citizens in the case of such attacks, and this is exactly what Israel has done through its measured and precise operation in the Gaza Strip. Significant achievements were gained through the operation targeted at terrorist leaders and their infrastructure, such as the underground tunnels used for weapon smuggling. At the same time, Israel did everything it could to avoid civilian casualties.

When following the international reporting and various activities around the world, many fingers point at Israel as the only source of these misfortunes, while neglecting the role of the Hamas terrorist regime and the suffering it causes to its own people in Gaza.

Pro-Palestine demonstrations held in the streets of Helsinki called for "Free Palestine from the River to the Sea", which questioned Israel's right to exist. While organizing a demonstration itself is a legitimate way to express one's opinion, it is worrying when a line is crossed from expressing opinions to incitement to ethnic and racial hatred.

A ceasefire was reached between Israel and Hamas at an Egyptian initiative on 21 May 2021.

Our hope – and my personal hope – is that the ceasefire will last, and that peace and quiet will be restored for both Israelis and Palestinians as well as the whole region of the Middle East.

Hagit Ben-Yaakov

Ambassador of Israel to Finland and Estonia