

Newsletter

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Shabab FM is a community radio station broadcasting on 97.9 FM in Birzeit and Ramallah areas, in Palestine. It is an independent media, promoted by the civil society and the local community and lead by youth and women. The objectives of Shabab FM are the following:

- strengthen social cohesion and participatory processes in Palestine, also in order to promote conflict resolution practices by communication tools
- empower the social protagonism of women and youth in Palestinian society
- spread independent information and build networks with international media involved in human rights issues

The project is promoted by [COSPE](#), [PYU](#) and [AMISnet](#), cofinanced by European Commission.

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Back from Gaza

An extract of the brief account of the stay in Gaza on 22 and 23 January 2009 by Francis Wurtz, president of GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament.

I was able to enter Gaza on Thursday 22 January [...] after a 24-hour wait at Rafah (Egyptian border). [...] We were able to come into direct contact with the population, on the ground and with residents, staying with families, sharing food with Palestinians from the most-affected refugee camps, talking for hours on end, in the darkness of a night without electricity, with victims who obviously felt the need to liberate themselves by testifying.

[...] It is to the north and east of Gaza City where we discover the worst devastation and where we heard the most serious stories for the Israeli army. In going there, one understands why journalists were kept well away from the military offensive! But traces of the terror inflicted for 22 days and nights on the population of Gaza are visible from the very first locality in the southern part of the territory: Rafah, a town of 180 000 inhabitants, 85% of whom are refugee families. There is no need for a guide. The people call out to you. They need to show the world the destruction they have suffered, to tell about the agony they have endured, to express - with great discretion and dignity -their long-standing suffering. A crowd of children follow you, no matter where you go: "What is your name? How are you?" they ask, laughing. They play, ask you to take a photo of them, but when we ask them about the war, a small child cries "we were trembling"!

In the centre of Rafah, there is a dense crowd around a small market and we are told that products are being sold there at prohibitive prices and have been smuggled in through the famous tunnels... The price to pay for the blockade. Around us, houses are in ruins, roofs are torn off, and entire families are sitting in the wrecks of their former homes. They tell us that a single strike by an F16 was enough to cause such destruction - a total of 80 impacts. This happened on the night of 31 December. [...] An elderly resident let us visit his "house" - which had become an open-air slum since the bombings. "There were never any weapons here, sir!" he repeated. "The aircraft didn't have a target. It bombed all of us!" [...] A discussion gets under way with the leader of the Rafah refugee camp. He is a cautious and courageous man. He has already spent five years of his life in Israeli jails and another period under supervised residence. A member of Fatah, he is experiencing other difficulties since Hamas came to power. But today, he only wants to speak about the war "that is striking all the people of Gaza". And for him, "Gaza is the soul of the Palestinian cause. The demand for a nation originated right here."

Near Khan Younis [...] in one place, we see a completely ravaged vineyard. In another, a water treatment plant, servicing the entire sector, crushed under shells fired by tanks. All around, all the houses are destroyed, except one building of which only the frame remains. We discover, sketched on a wall, an outline of neighbouring targets - including the sewage treatment plant - annotated in Hebrew. All the people here stress "there are no soldiers among us. Why do they destroy everything? Why do they kill our children?" Exasperation is at its highest. Downtown, we stop near a crowded mosque: the Friday prayer service has become a political meeting against ... Mahmoud Abbas and "all those smooth talkers. Faith and perseverance are our strengths" - we hear them say. "With the help of God, we will be victorious." This should be food for thought for those who supported the war "to get rid of Hamas."

We arrive in Gaza city. We stop at one of the schools run by UNRWA, the United Nations relief agency for Palestinian refugees: seriously damaged by bombs. Neighbours show us on their mobiles the unbearable images of the deluge of fire which rained down on the city! Another "military" target: the seat of ... the Palestinian Red Crescent, adjacent to Qods hospital! Here again, there remains only the burnt-out frame: the phosphorus bombs have done their work. A little further, an enormous stock of medicines was destroyed by bombs. Also bombed, the building housing the civil registry. Elsewhere, a lemonade factory was destroyed, from which 27 corpses were dug out. Further on, a kindergarten,



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also destroyed. Then the Barcelona park - built by Spain: destroyed. Nearby, an 11-storey building: destroyed. Further on, a cemetery: destroyed! [...]

We arrived in Zeitoun, to the east of Gaza City. Before us, as far as the eye can see, an immense landscape of ruins. Everything is devastated: houses, farms and factories. Nothing remains. The smell is there, more than two weeks after the drama and is unbearable. The testimonies paralyse us with fear. The press, in the meantime, reported the essential facts of this story. This is where the Samouni family lost 33 of its members, in a building where Israeli soldiers, who were there in large numbers, held them for over a day without food or water! Before crushing them under shellfire. The survivors' accounts left us speechless. This was obviously a deliberate massacre of civilians. Accompanied, in addition, by acts of infinite cruelty. They were committed on 5 January.

[...] In Ezbet Abed Rabbo, another terrible war crime was perpetrated, according to witnesses' accounts. Between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m., Khaled tells us, three tanks approached his house. An order to leave the house was given by loudspeaker. The whole family complied, raising a white rag. In front of them, two young tank soldiers were eating bars of chocolate and packs of crisps indifferently, without addressing a word to them. Suddenly, a third soldier gets out of the tank, fires, killing two of the family's small girls and wounding a third. For more than two hours, the soldiers forbade the family to move before telling the father of both girls: "you can leave"! After a moment's silence, Khaled continued: a neighbour tried to help the survivors by bringing his ambulance closer. Soldiers forced him to get out of the vehicle before crushing the ambulance with a tank. (The remains of the ambulance were there for all to see.) Slightly further away, another neighbour came to help them, with his cart drawn by a donkey. Both the man and the animal were slaughtered in turn, said Khaled, giving us this person's name. These allegations are so serious that naturally they need to be checked. The vision of horror, as far as the eye can see, in any case substantiates the hypothesis of relentless violence and of barely imaginable cruelty on the part of the Israeli army.

We arrive in Jabalia, a major urban centre in the north. The only refugee camp there counts more than 100,000 inhabitants. It is there that one (other) United Nations school was bombed: 47 bodies were pulled out from under the debris. The father of the one of the victims, 24 years old, desperately repeats: "we were brought here so that we would be in safety. We no longer have anywhere to go where we can shelter." It was the repeated bombings targeting United Nations' premises that led the UN Secretary-General to return there, shortly before our arrival, and to legitimately make some very harsh remarks. Another neighbourhood, another landscape of ruins, and another devastating testimony: "they came into our home", said the tired, monotonous voice of an old man sitting in front of his undamaged house. He tells us about the drama experienced by his family: "they flattened them against the wall, the men on one side, and the women on the other. They took my 42-year-old son to the first floor and shot him. Then, on their way back downstairs, they said to my other son: "your brother is dead. You can call for help." But when he came out with his hands up, they cut his fingers off with a blast of gunfire. Then they stayed there, preventing the ambulance from approaching. They also fired on an UNRWA (UN) car which had come to help my family, because my son had been employed by them for 20 years. They managed to contact an Arab MP in the Knesset. He contacted Ehud Barak so that he could intervene. Barak refused, stressing that "where the army is present, the army decides". When my family was finally able to see my son, they realised that he had not died immediately. They had left him to suffer and bleed to death! He leaves eight orphans. Five of them were present when they fired." Prostrate, the old man then stopped speaking. [...] Another person calls for "a real solution: to be able to live as a family and for children to be able to go to school." When we start to leave, a voice calls out: "Don't forget us! We are counting on you! Tell them!" We have not forgotten them.

[...] This implies above all much greater political courage and independence so that historic opportunities are not lost, such as the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and 2005 - which would have allowed for the normalisation of relations of the entire Arab world with Israel in return for a return to the 1967 borders! Or the Palestinian government of national unity of 2007 set up on the same bases between Mahmoud Abbas and the Hamas. This more generally implies relations with Israel, which would no longer be based on complacency and impunity, but on the strict respect of international law and of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Truth, justice, peace... After all, we are only calling for these "European values" to be translated into acts.

Brussels, 27 January 2009

Francis Wurtz
President of GUE/NGL

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Louis Michel visits Gaza

European Union's Commissioner Louis Michel visited Gaza City on 26 January, where he



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called for maintaining the ceasefire, opening border crossings and lifting the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip.

Standing in front of the missiled UN storehouses, bombed by Israel during the three week onslaught, Michel expressed his astonishment at the damage caused by the Israeli offensive.

Israel violated international and human rights, he said, and affirmed that civilians were directly targeted during the attacks. He expressed shock at the evidence that 50% of victims were civilians including women and children.

“The most painful thing for me was the sizable of destruction in infra-structures, economic facilities and factories which used to provide work opportunities for the Palestinians. [The destruction of these] was an unjustifiable violation of international law,” he stated.

At the same time, Michel condemned all military action against civilians, including Israeli civilians, referring to the home-made projectiles the Palestinian factions launch from the Gaza Strip towards Israeli towns. He described that as “terrorism” because those attacks target guiltless people.

He added, “Today I believe more than any other time in the past that military operations can never be a solution. Instead, the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip should be maintained, and crossing points should be completely open not only for passage of humanitarian aid, but also to refresh the economy in the strip.”

Source:
[Ma'an News](#)

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Obama, take away the pain in my stomach

MachsomWatch, in existence since 2001, is an organisation of peace activist Israeli women against the Israeli Occupation of the territories and the systematic repression of the Palestinian nation. Those women call for Palestinian freedom of movement within their own territory and for an end to the Occupation that destroys Palestinian society and inflicts grievous harm on Israeli society.

They use to stay in lots of the checkpoints inside Palestine, monitoring the behavior of the military and protecting Palestinian human and civil rights, bearing witness in the form of reports concerning human rights infractions, violence, punishments and abuses suffered by Palestinians passing through the checkpoints.

[Click here](#) to see and listen an open letter published on You Tube, sent from one of Machsomwatch activists to the USA president Barak Obama.

www.machsomwatch.org

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Call to protect human rights in OPT

An extract of a call addressed to EU by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

The [Palestinian Centre for Human Rights](#) (PCHR), demands that the European Union immediately takes action in order to protect human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The EU is currently failing in its obligations to effectively intervene in order to protect the lives of civilians in the OPT, especially civilians in the Gaza Strip, whose human rights are being massively violated by the Israeli Occupation Forces.

Despite the overwhelming number of Palestinian civilians killed by the Israeli Forces during its offensive in the Gaza Strip, the 27 EU member states abstained from the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on 12 January, 2009, which condemned the military offensive in the Gaza Strip because of “massive violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people.” A week later, on 20 January, the Czech Foreign Minister and President-in-Office of the EU Council, Karl Schwarzenberg, claimed that the EU presidency, which is currently held by the Czech Republic, “should not act as a judge”. “I have never seen a war were humanitarian law was completely respected” added Schwarzenberg.

The EU abstentions from the UN Human Rights Council resolution highlight that the 27 EU member states are blatantly failing in their obligations as High Contracting Parties to the (1949) Fourth Geneva Convention to protect the lives of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

PCHR demands that the international community, including all EU member states, act immediately in order to protect the lives and property of all Palestinians, especially the 1.5 million civilians who continue to be imprisoned under siege inside the Gaza Strip.

The Centre reiterates that the root of the continuing violence in the OPT is the continuing military occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including occupied East Jerusalem. International silence is encouraging Israel to continue to use excessive lethal force against civilians, including the widespread use of bombs believed to contain white phosphorous, and to act with utter impunity.

The Centre demands that the EU does not upgrade its political and economic relationship



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with Israel vis a vis the EU-Israel Association Agreement. The Agreement is conditional on Israel's respect for human rights. Rewarding Israel with an upgrade on the basis of "shared values" whilst Israel blatantly continues to systematically violate Palestinian human rights in the OPT will only further encourage Israel to act as though it is completely above the law.

The EU has a vital role to play regarding Israel's accountability, and the 27 member states must all meet their obligations regarding independent investigations into the crimes that PCHR believes have been committed against the civilians of the Gaza Strip. All Palestinians in the Gaza Strip deserve justice, and the EU member states must finally make a stand for the respect of law, and the protection of civilian lives.

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