

Kshama Sawant on Gaza Solidarity: End the Brutal Violence and Killings

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[Because Kshama Sawant is at the moment the leading elected socialist official in the United States her opinions carry a weight far more important than those of many other socialist groups and activists. We print below Sawant's recent statement on Israel's attacks on Gaza made in the Seattle City Council and reprinted on the Socialist Alternative website. - Eds]

Transcript of statement by Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant:

"This Saturday I attended the weekly peaceful protest in Seattle against the violence being inflicted by the Israeli state on the people of Gaza.

It was really gratifying to see a strong and defiant spirit at the protest at Westlake, and the solidarity from progressive people in Seattle, regardless of ethnicity and national origin. I was especially struck by the energy of young political activists, something that should be encouraged and fostered in the interest of social justice.

This horrific war purportedly began as a response to the death of three Israelis. Since then, according to *Al Jazeera* news sources, at least 1,830 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 9,406 others injured. Sixty-three Israeli soldiers have also died, along with two Israeli civilians and a Thai worker.

Israel yesterday attacked a United Nations school sheltering some 3,000 displaced people in Rafah, in southern Gaza, *The Seattle Times* reported on this today on the front page (PDF), which killed 10 people. The U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the attack as both "a moral outrage and a criminal act."

Rocket attacks by Hamas against Israelis also must be condemned. When they hurt anyone, they hurt innocent civilians and give an excuse for Israel's ruling class to further unleash their war machine.

In this current war, the Israeli "Iron Dome" system has intercepted almost all rockets with an identified potential to hit civilians. It is not by accident that only one of the three civilians in Israel who lost their lives was killed by a rocket, and that he was a Bedouin from the south of Israel who, like tens of thousands of Bedouins in the south, was denied any right of protection due to the racist policies of the Israeli state.

All killing of innocent people, women and children especially, should be condemned. And the last month of killings of Palestinians in Gaza is not only stomach-turning, it is only one in a long and documented series of war crimes stretching over decades. This has been happening with the tacit or overt complicity of US imperialism and I think we as elected officials have to have a statement describing the role that the U.S. Congress and Senate have played.

The *New York Times* has reported that nearly 60,000 people have lost their homes in Gaza, and the number of people taking shelter in schools is nearly five times as many as in 2009. The cost to Gaza's already fragile economy will be significant: the 2009 conflict caused losses estimated at \$4 billion — almost three times the size of Gaza's annual gross domestic product. That gives us a sense

of the scale of the damage.

It is the responsibility of elected officials everywhere to openly speak out to stop the humanitarian catastrophe, and to condemn it in the strongest possible terms.

Next Saturday, there will be the weekly protest from noon to 2:00 PM protest at Westlake. On Thursday at 7:30 PM at Seattle Central Community College, a pots and pans noise brigade against the violence in Gaza. I invite everyone to join us there."

Councilmember Tom Rasmussen: "May I say something?"

Councilmember Sawant: "Yes, please."

Councilmember Tom Rasmussen: "I want to say that you do not reflect my views. These are your personal views. And I respect that. I personally abhor the war, and the violence that is occurring in Gaza and in that area in general, but I believe that it is wrong to condemn one party alone. And so you may use your podium as you wish, but I do not share your views in terms of condemning one party alone. But I do share your view in terms of abhorring the war and the violence that's occurring."

Councilmember Sawant: "Thank you for expressing your views, Councilmember Rasmussen, I really appreciate it. Just for the record, I would like to remind everyone that in my statement I condemned both sides, and I don't condone violence of any kind. That is my opinion. Again, I think it is necessary for us to acknowledge the complete lack of proportion between the violence that Hamas is capable of, and the violence that has been inflicted by the Israeli state on Palestine. That's my view. We all should express our views and I really appreciate you engaging in the discussion."