

Ukrainian Letter of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

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نص الرسالة باللغة العربية українською

We, Ukrainian researchers, artists, political and labour activists, members of civil society stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine who for 75 years have been subjected and resisted Israeli military occupation, separation, settler colonial violence, ethnic cleansing, land dispossession and apartheid. We write this letter as people to people. The dominant discourse on the governmental level and even among solidarity groups that support the struggles of Ukrainians and Palestinians often creates separation. With this letter we reject these divisions, and affirm our solidarity with everyone who is oppressed and struggling for freedom.

As activists committed to freedom, human rights, democracy and social justice, and while fully acknowledging power differentials, we firmly condemn attacks on civilian populations - be they Israelis attacked by Hamas or Palestinians attacked by the Israeli occupation forces and armed settler gangs. Deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime. Yet this is no justification for the collective punishment of Palestinian people, identifying all residents of Gaza with Hamas and the indiscriminate use of the term "terrorism" applied to the whole Palestinian resistance. Nor is this a justification of continuation of the ongoing occupation. Echoing multiple UN resolutions, we know that there will be no lasting peace without justice for the Palestinian people.

On October 7 we witnessed Hamas' violence against the civilians in Israel, an event that is now singled out by many to demonize and dehumanize Palestinian resistance altogether. Hamas, a reactionary Islamist organization, needs to be seen in a wider historical context and decades of Israel encroaching on Palestinian land, long before this organization came to exist in the late 1980s. During the Nakba ("catastrophe") of 1948, more than 700,000 Palestinians were brutally displaced

from their homes, with entire villages massacred and destroyed. Since its creation Israel has never stopped pursuing its colonial expansion. The Palestinians were forced to exile, fragmented and administered under different regimes. Some of them are Israeli citizens affected by structural discrimination and racism. Those living in the occupied West Bank are subjected to apartheid under decades of Israel's military control. The people of the Gaza Strip have suffered from the blockade imposed by Israel since 2006, which restricted movement of people and goods, resulting in growing poverty and deprivation.

Since the 7th of October and at the time of writing the death toll in the Gaza Strip is more than 8,500 people. Women and children have made up more than 62 percent of the fatalities, while more than 21,048 people have been injured. In recent days, Israel has bombed schools, residential areas, Greek Orthodox Church and several hospitals. Israel has also cut all water, electricity, and fuel supply in the Gaza Strip. There is a severe shortage of food and medicine, causing a total collapse of a healthcare system.

Most of the Western and Israeli media justifies these deaths as mere collateral damage to fighting Hamas but is silent when it comes to Palestinian civilians targeted and killed in the Occupied West Bank. Since the beginning of 2023 alone, and before October 7, the death toll on the Palestinian side had already reached 227. Since the 7 of October, 121 Palestinian civilians have been killed in the occupied West Bank. More than 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners are currently detained in Israeli prisons. Lasting peace and justice are only possible with the end of the ongoing occupation. Palestinians have the right to self-determination and resistance against Israel's occupation, just like Ukrainians have the right to resist Russian invasion.

Our solidarity comes from a place of anger at the injustice, and a place of deep pain of knowing the devastating impacts of occupation, shelling of civil infrastructure, and humanitarian blockade from experiences in our homeland. Parts of Ukraine have been occupied since 2014, and the international community failed to stop Russian aggression then, ignoring the imperial and colonial nature of the armed violence, which consequently escalated on the 24th of February 2022. Civilians in Ukraine are shelled daily, in their homes, in hospitals, on bus stops, in queues for bread. As a result of the Russian occupation, thousands of people in Ukraine live without access to water, electricity or heating, and it is the most vulnerable groups that are mostly affected by the destruction of critical infrastructure. In the months of the siege and heavy bombardment of Mariupol there was no humanitarian corridor. Watching the Israeli targeting the civilian infrastructure in Gaza, the Israeli humanitarian blockade and occupation of land resonates especially painfully with us. From this place of pain of experience and solidarity, we call on our fellow Ukrainians globally and all the people to raise their voices in support of the Palestinian people and condemn the ongoing Israeli mass ethnic cleansing.

We reject the Ukrainian government statements that express unconditional support for Israel's military actions, and we consider the calls to avoid civilian casualties by Ukraine's MFA belated and insufficient. This position is a retreat from the support of Palestinian rights and condemnation of the Israeli occupation, which Ukraine has followed for decades, including voting in the UN. Aware of the pragmatic geopolitical reasoning behind Ukraine's decision to echo Western allies, on whom we are dependent for our survival, we see the current support of Israel and dismissing Palestinian right to self-determination as contradictory to Ukraine's own commitment to human rights and fight for our land and freedom. We as Ukrainians should stand in solidarity not with the oppressors, but with those who experience and resist the oppression.

We strongly object to equating of Western military aid to Ukraine and Israel by some politicians. Ukraine doesn't occupy the territories of other people, instead, it fights against the Russian occupation, and therefore international assistance serves a just cause and the protection of international law. Israel has occupied and annexed Palestinian and Syrian territories, and Western aid to it confirms an unjust order and demonstrates double standards in relation to international law. We oppose the new wave of Islamophobia, such as the brutal murder of a Palestinian American 6-year old and assault on his family in Illinois, USA, and the equating of any criticism of Israel with

anti-Semitism. At the same time, we also oppose holding all Jewish people all over the world accountable for the politics of the state of Israel and we condemn anti-Semitic violence, such as the mob attack on the airplane in Daghestan, Russia. We also reject the revival of the “war on terror” rhetoric used by the US and EU to justify war crimes and violations of international law that have undermined the international security system, caused countless deaths, and has been borrowed by other states, including Russia for the war in Chechnya and China for the Uyghur genocide. Now Israel is using it to carry out ethnic cleansing.

Call to Action

We urge the implementation of the call to ceasefire, put forward by the UN General Assembly resolution.

We call on the Israeli government to immediately stop attacks on civilians, and provide humanitarian aid; we insist on an immediate and indefinite lifting of siege on Gaza and an urgent relief operation to restore civilian infrastructure. We also call on the Israeli government to put an end to the occupation and recognise the right of Palestinian displaced people to return to their lands.

We call on the Ukrainian government to condemn the use of state sanctioned terror and humanitarian blockade against the Gazan civilian population and reaffirm the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination. We also call on the Ukrainian government to condemn deliberate assaults on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

We call on the international media to stop pitting Palestinians and Ukrainians against each other, where hierarchies of suffering perpetuate racist rhetoric and dehumanize those under attack.

We have witnessed the world uniting in solidarity for the people of Ukraine and we call on everyone to do the same for the people of Palestine.

Signatures:

1. Volodymyr Artiukh, researcher
2. Levon Azizian, human rights lawyer
3. Diana Azzuz, artist, musician
4. Taras Bilous, editor
5. Oksana Briukhovetska, artist, researcher, University of Michigan
6. Artem Chapeye, writer
7. Valentyn Dolhochub, researcher, soldier
8. Nataliya Gumenyuk, journalist
9. John-Paul Himka, professor emeritus, University of Alberta
10. Karina Al Khmuz, biomedical engineer programmer

And more than 100 others.