

I Stand With Israel
10 August 2014

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

Shalom

I am not Jewish nor am I Israeli. I am a Maori New Zealander and a friend of Israel. I am here today to stand with Israel and to remember those whose lives have been lost in this conflict.

As a mother I grieve with the mothers and fathers who have lost children. I grieve with the Palestinian mothers who have lost young ones. I grieve with the Israeli mothers who have lost sons who fought bravely to defend their country.

As we watch this battle unfolding we are grieved and saddened, but also indignant. So many have made hasty judgements on this conflict, based on what the media has chosen to present. For any fair minded, thinking person it ought to be blatantly obvious that we are not being presented with the full picture. One knows that news reports are biased and unbalanced when they begin, 'Israeli bombardment of Gaza continues' but then fail to mention:

- that Israel is bombing in response to rockets that have been fired
- that Hamas has repeatedly violated ceasefire agreements
- that more than twenty thousand rockets have rained down on Israel over the last nine years

The background and context are repeatedly ignored.

The media has chosen to focus on the numbers of civilian casualties. Having been fed Hamas-approved photos and images, the media has created a distorted picture of the situation. It is only now that journalists are leaving the intimidating environment in Gaza and returning to their home countries that some have been brave enough to speak the truth:

That Hamas has staged scenes to make it appear that children were targeted by Israel.

That it's very hard to know exactly how many civilians were killed because Hamas operatives dress as civilians.

That Hamas has committed war crimes by hiding amongst civilians and firing rockets from heavily populated areas including UN operated schools and even hospitals.

That the tally of casualties reported by the UN are those given to them by Hamas, without independent verification. Even the BBC is now advising caution in interpreting the Gaza casualty statistics.

The media also fails to follow up when, for example, it is discovered that it was actually Hamas who killed its own civilians by mis-firing rockets. The damage of the first sensational report having been done, it is never properly rectified. Israel remains the villain.

Israeli authorities told us all along that Hamas uses its civilians as human shields.

Those of us who know Israel and Israelis were not duped by the biased reporting. We know that Israel is a democratic country with institutions in place to ensure accountability. The fact that an Israeli President can be convicted in a trial presided over by an Israeli Arab Judge is a great example of this accountability. This also exposes the lie that Israel is an apartheid state. Arab Israelis enjoy more rights and freedoms than Arabs in any other Middle Eastern country.

Israel is a pluralistic society in which there is a great variety of voices and opinions across a broad political spectrum. Issues are debated openly and vigorously. My family has had the privilege to meet hundreds of fine young Israelis who have travelled to NZ, many of whom we have visited in Israel. The overwhelming desire of their hearts is to live at peace with their neighbours.

But the media has chosen to focus on the number of casualties as if this were an indicator as to who held the moral high ground. Perhaps they would have felt better if there were more dead Israelis?

In fact the media is culpable. Hamas's documents confirm that their strategy is to manipulate world opinion by maximizing their own civilian toll. The media cooperates with Hamas in this by presenting Palestinian casualties without showing the necessary context that it is Hamas who is responsible for those civilians being placed in harm's way. Thus Hamas is encouraged to continue sacrificing its own civilians because it is a cynical strategy that works.

And while hundreds of reporters are stationed in Gaza, we hear one lone report today that children are being ripped apart by Assad's barrel bombing in Syria.

And while hundreds of reporters are stationed in Gaza we hear one lone report from Syria today that children are being ripped apart by Assad's barrel bombing in Syria.

Irresponsible media coverage has contributed to the explosion of anti-Semitic expression around the world, including the event in Sydney last week in which a group of Jewish school children were terrorised on a school bus. Thugs taunted the children with slogans such as 'kill the Jews', 'heil Hitler', 'we're going to cut your throats and slice your throats open.'

This, in Sydney!

The fact is, Israel prioritises the safety of its people by providing bomb shelters and investing in the iron dome system which has neutralized so many Palestinian missiles. Meanwhile Hamas performs its double war crime, firing indiscriminately at Israeli civilians whilst hiding amongst its own civilians.

And this is the dilemma. Should Israel refrain from targeting Hamas terrorists and risk its own people being killed? The Israeli government is doing what any responsible government must do. She is protecting her citizens.

The IDF has done more than any other army in the history of warfare to minimize civilian casualties in enemy territory.

If the issue were really the number of civilians killed, why are we not hearing an outcry over the thousands of innocent Christians and other minorities being killed in Iraq as we speak?

Where is the outcry over the hundreds of thousands that have been killed in Syria over the past couple of years.

Where is the outcry over the hundreds being killed by Boko Haram in Nigeria right now?

There are Christian children being beheaded right now by ISIS in Mosul, Iraq, and their heads put on a stick.

Where is the international outrage?

Where is the media coverage?

Where are the protests and street marches?

The silence is deafening.

The crux of the matter is this: the ideology that drives Hamas glorifies death and martyrdom. It is an ideology invested in the next life, not this one. It is an ideology intent on establishing an Islamic caliphate in which there will be no room for infidels. And no room for Jews. This is the real motivation behind Hamas' attack on Israel.

This is not about so-called occupation. If it were, then why did Gazans not seize the opportunity to create a flourishing society when Israel withdrew fully from Gaza in 2005? Instead of establishing a thriving economic base they poured millions of dollars of aid money into building a terrorist enclave.

The ideology driving Hamas is the same one motivating other Islamic groups around the world such as Isis in Iraq and Boko Karam in Nigeria. If this sounds over-dramatic, just look at what is happening in the Middle East and look at what is happening in Europe. Let us not be so naive as to think it will end there. Israel is only the "little Satan". America is the "great Satan" ...and then there's the rest of the civilised world.

Hamas has stated clearly in its charter that it does not want peace with Israel. Israel is to be annihilated.

As a Maori I stand with a nation that protects the rights of all ethnic groups.

As a woman I stand with a nation in which women are treated with dignity and respect and enjoy opportunity and freedom.

As a Christian, I am grateful for a shared spiritual heritage and I stand with a people whose gifts and calling are irrevocable. I stand with a nation that allows freedom of religion and that respects the holy sites of all religions.

As a Kiwi who likes to see a 'fair go', I stand with a nation that is at the forefront of a fight for democracy, freedom, civilisation, and life.

For all these reasons and more, let us together declare our support for Israel and stand with her, at such a time as this.

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