

Dear Friends and Supporters.

It is rather unusual for us to send you two emails in one week. However, we know that many of you have been enquiring as to what RHR's position is on the current blockade of Gaza. We are committed to doing what we can to stop the blockade and hope that we can prevail on the international community to do more to bring an end to the firing of kassam rockets on Israel. Our task is not easy. A poll done for Israel's "Reshet B" radio station found that some 63.7% believe that we should intensify the blockade and 10% believe that we should leave it the way it is, while only 22.1% believe that it should be lessened.

Please find below RHR's position paper on Gaza and Sderot, and RHR's call to the international community to help stop the kassam rockets.

[Shabbat Shalom](#),

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Stop the War on Civilians
**RHR CALLS FOR THE IMMEDIATE CESSATION OF THE GAZA BLOCKADE AND THE
FIRING OF KASSAM ROCKETS**

RHR will try to enlist international pressure to stop the kassams and will take internal measures to end the blockade.

We, the rabbis of Rabbis For Human Rights (RHR), call on our people and on the Palestinian people to rise above their suffering, their anger and their fear in order to honor God's Image in every human being, respect international law and remember that the ends do not always justify the means.

As a rabbinic organization, RHR recognizes God's Image in every human being. As a human rights organization, we recognize our collective obligation to adhere to international law. Targeting civilians tramples on these sacred values, whether it be the kassams falling on Sderot, Ashkelon and other Gaza border communities, or whether it be the great suffering Israel is causing to Gazans by preventing the delivery of diesel fuel and electricity.

We don't need to convince our fellow Israelis regarding the suffering of our brothers and sisters under fire. We can quibble about details in Gaza, but it is clear that Israel's limiting of fuel, electricity, medicine and food has caused such enormous suffering that hundreds of thousands of Gazans have in desperation broken through the Egyptian border. We do not yet know what the implications of this breakthrough will be. However, according to our data, even after Israel allowed some fuel into Gaza this week there is a disastrous increase in the number of Palestinians without clean water and electricity during these cold winter nights, while hospitals can not operate properly.

The ends do not justify the means. We too are frustrated and afraid, as Israel has not found the way to protect her citizens. However, the truth is that a country that observes international law must fight with one army tied behind her back. Not everything is permitted in the name of security. The Palestinian people have suffered from 40 years of Occupation in the West Bank and Israel's near total control over Gaza even after the disengagement. As an occupied people, Palestinians feel that they do not have many options. Nevertheless, the Palestinian rights to freedom, justice and an end to the Occupation do not justify the trauma, destruction, injuries and life threatening danger to which the kassam rockets expose innocent civilians. It is easy to maintain that the entire Palestinian people are legitimate targets because they support terrorists. It is easy to maintain that every Israeli is a legitimate target because our very presence robs the Palestinian people of their land. However, as Rabbi Shmuel Tamerat taught regarding the exodus from Egypt, even when a cause is just, any contact with violence transforms the victim into a victimizer. The difference between the two is less than a hair's breath.

It is true that the saving of human life (*Pikuakh Nefesh*) justifies many means, but not everything. In the talmudic tractate of Sanhedrin we learn that the right and obligation of self defense when somebody threatens us does not permit the killing of innocents. On page 70a we are taught that "When somebody comes to kill you, get up earlier and kill him/her first." Israel must take measures to stop those who are firing the rockets and those who give the orders. However, we learn on 74a that the person who kills somebody pursuing a third person to kill him/her is a murderer if s/he could have stopped the pursuer by any other means. Raba, one of the same talmudic rabbis who said that one must kill the person coming to kill you, was asked by one man what to do when the strong man of his village threatened that he would kill him if the man did not kill an innocent third person. Rabba answered, "Let yourself be killed rather than kill. Who is to say that your blood is redder than his."

Even steps taken in the name of self-defense must meet three criteria: 1. They must achieve the goal. One can not violate human rights and cause suffering in order to allow one to feel that s/he is "doing something," if that something does not actually save life. 2. There is no less harmful way to achieve the same goal. 3. Innocent people are not killed.

The blockade and the firing of kassam rockets do not meet these criteria. Despite the natural instinct to strike out in the name of a legitimate goal, the solution to the desecration of God's name and God's Image within every human being, and to the rising level of human suffering is to overcome our instincts in order to build a better and more just future for all. We must be Pursuers of Peace in the tradition of Aaron the High Priest and remember the teaching that the person who is truly mighty is the one who manages to turn an enemy into a friend. (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan Chapter 13*)

RHR is committed to finding ways to work within Israel to stop the blockade and the attached appeal calls on the international community to help stop the kassam rockets.

APPEAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Dear _____,

Rabbis for Human Rights, an organization with a clear record of defending Palestinian human rights, urges the world community to increase pressure on Hamas and other organizations in Gaza to stop firing Kassam rockets on Sderot, Ashkelon and other Israeli communities bordering Gaza. 2,400 rockets and mortar shells have fallen during the last year on Sderot alone, threatening lives and causing injury, trauma and extensive damage. We understand our responsibility to stop the collective punishment of Gazans and we understand that, even after the disengagement Israel maintains total control over Gaza. However, no other country in the world would or should be expected to allow rockets to fall on its citizens day after day if it has any ability whatsoever to react. As rabbis, we believe that every human being is created in God's Image. Just as we must respect the Divine Image in all, even in those with whom we are in conflict, we must insist that both Gazans and the world community respect the Divine Image within us. As a human rights organization, we understand that international law places limits on what Israel is permitted to do, even in the name of self defense. However, that same international law limits what Gazans may do, even in the name of fighting ongoing occupation in the West Bank and Israeli control over Gaza.

The tragedy is that those who wish to derail renewed peace negotiations are succeeding. This guarantees further suffering by all. Efforts aimed at influencing only one side have little chance of succeeding. Only a concerted effort aimed at getting all parties to honor God's Image within every human being, as well as international law, can stop this unfolding desecration of all that we hold sacred.

B'Vrakha (In Blessing)