

# Kiwis must condemn Israel's attacks on Gaza

In 1940 the Nazis herded Polish Jews and Romani people into a small area of Warsaw which became known as the Warsaw Ghetto. Of the population, 38 per cent were confined to just 4.5% of the capital's land area.

It was walled off, with German soldiers manning all entry points. Human suffering was enormous. The 440,000 inhabitants were allocated just 184 calories of food each day while German daily rations were 2614 calories. Starvation and disease were rampant.

Despite the hardship, the Jews in the ghetto organised hospitals, schools, soup kitchens and even set up factories to produce goods to be smuggled out and sold while children were used to smuggle in food and supplies.

From 1942 the population was reduced as trainloads were sent to the Treblinka death camp where up to a million Jews and Romanis were gassed or shot and their bodies burned.

In the face of this appalling oppression, the Jewish inhabitants staged the first European uprising against the Nazis in 1943. This courageous armed revolt held the German army at bay for several days until the ghetto was razed block by block and the last inhabitants murdered. We can only wonder at the fighting spirit of these Polish Jews against impossible odds.

It's worth remembering the irony of all this when considering the Israeli siege of Gaza and treatment of Palestinians forced to live on this small strip of land. For the past two years or so, Gaza has been an open-air prison for 1.5 million Palestinians with Israel closing off all entry points. More than half Gaza's population

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survives on food aid, but medicine, food and fuel supplies to the territory have been strangled by Israel and eased only sporadically under international pressure on Israel.

Palestinians built tunnels to get food and provisions in illegally. Last year they blasted and bulldozed several sections of wall so that via this mass prison break they could get some relief and supplies from Egypt. Like the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, they have used all means possible to survive and fight back against overwhelming odds.

The attack on Gaza has little to do with a few home-made rockets fired into Israel. Instead the object is to destroy the democratically elected Hamas government. Hamas has advocated the fight-back by Palestinians with whatever means available, and for this they have been shunned by the United States and the European Union who, as punishment for voting for the wrong people, cut support for the Palestinians while Israel applied a chokehold via its Gaza siege. The US only supports democracy for everyone if they vote for the right people.

Israel was condemned internationally for launching a ground offensive which United Nations General Assembly president Miguel d'Escoto calls "a monstrosity". But our Foreign Minister, Murray McCully, endorses the Israeli attacks with his silence. Like George Bush he blames Hamas for the latest

Israeli outrages and expects Palestinians to accept their oppression without fighting back.

As Palestinian activist Hanan Ashrawi puts it: "We are the only people on Earth asked to guarantee the security of our occupier while Israel is the only country that calls for defence from its victims."

It seems that just as with South Africa, the only way to end the decades-long occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the de facto apartheid policies towards the Palestinian people is to impose comprehensive sanctions against Israel.

As well as the siege in Gaza the situation in the Israeli-occupied West Bank is an affront to humanity. Last month the Association for Civil Rights in Israel said Israel's discrimination between Jewish settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank was increasingly reminiscent of white South Africa's apartheid system. The group said Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territory had created a situation of institutionalised discrimination and segregation.

None of this is new. As far back as 1989 South Africa's Bishop Desmond Tutu said if you change the names, the description of what is happening in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would be a description of events in South Africa.

Israel is a regime that defies international law and breaks all boundaries of civilised behaviour. No amount of polite criticism will change its behaviour.

New Zealanders should support the Palestinians, who refuse to be second-class citizens in the land of their birth.

We should celebrate their fighting spirit, as we do that of the heroic Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto.