

9 June 2010

## **VIVIAN WINEMAN, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DEPUTIES, BRIEFS THE COMMUNITY: FLOTILLA EPISODE**

Although a week has passed since last week's tragic Flotilla episode our emotions are still raw. As a community we have felt impotent as the rights and wrongs of this affair have been disingenuously played out on the world stage with one clear, propaganda narrative emerging - the now in-vogue, prejudiced narrative demonising Israel as a rogue state which has lost its moral compass.

Once again we see the disproportionate attention paid to Israel while larger more significant conflicts, some involving far greater loss of life, are virtually ignored. The community, Jews throughout the Diaspora and in Israel ask why there is such selective outrage against Israel and such demonisation of the State and its citizens.

There is no doubt that Israel has taken a beating to her already declining reputation. It is not within this communication that I seek to explore just how, where and when this occurred. Rather, to offer a reminder that irrespective of that, as Jews, Israel resides at the core of our concerns whatever we make of her policies, actions and Government.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews is not a mouthpiece for the Israeli government to defend Israeli policy, but the Board is committed both by its Constitution and by the intense commitment of its leaders and members to "take such appropriate action as lies within its power to advance Israel's security, welfare and standing". We do so within a framework that acutely recognises the divergent views that comprise the unique fabric of this community. At this time of crisis we are here to make sense out of a situation that is complex, difficult, controversial and confusing.

But it is not just because of this moral obligation. Events in the Middle East impinge directly on our community through antisemitism – both verbal and physical - as we sadly saw in last year's CST statistics.

The level of disbelief and misunderstanding of Israel's predicament permeated not only most of the media but was reflected in the Parliamentary exchanges in the House of Commons last week, and the views articulated suggest a worrying shift both in policy and approach towards Israel.

To combat those trends we need your direct help and that of as many of those in your community. We call on the entire community to join us in our huge undertaking by doing what we can to set the record straight and to assist opinion formers and policy makers, media and Government alike, with the facts – helping them differentiate between fact and fiction, and between fact and propaganda.

Amid all the calls for enquiry some facts are undoubted:

- Israel, like any other sovereign state, has an inherent right of self defence and a duty to protect her citizens especially against ongoing rocket attacks from Gaza.

- The rocket attacks against towns and cities in southern Israel have continued throughout the last months, four were fired last Thursday night and one reached Ashkelon on Friday evening.
- The maritime blockade of Gaza has to a considerable degree protected Israel's citizens from recent lethal rocket attacks launched from Gaza but does not stop them entirely .
- While not ideal, Israel not only offers and continues to provide other routes through which humanitarian aid can reach Palestinian civilians in Gaza, but all of the aid taken off the flotilla last week has lain in Ashdod port simply because Hamas has refused permission for its delivery.
- Israel is delivering truck loads of supplies on a daily basis – mostly in conjunction with various aid agencies to ensure it is made available to those most in need. Details of the items and quantities are regularly published disproving the wilder and often false claims by some of those quoted last week.
- Despite reports to the contrary, building materials are sent in from Israel but only given to agencies such as UNWRA to ensure they do not get misappropriated by Hamas for protecting their fighters and rocket launching sites.
- Last week's flotilla episode was nothing to do with delivering humanitarian aid and everything to do with making a propagandist political statement. The fact that there was a violent outcome is regarded by Hamas as a victory.
- Whatever the wisdom of the operation mounted by the Israeli Navy, the extreme violence displayed towards the commandos including the kidnapping of three of them and the attempted murder of one of them left the remaining commandos in an impossible position in which clearly their lives were in grave danger.
- It was revealing that on none of the other five boats in the flotilla were there any similar incidents, but those on the Turkish vessel were armed and ready to create an incident, knowing full well that it would gain the world's attention.
- Those passengers on the Marmara who engaged the commandos were reportedly not human rights activists but hard line Islamists, many of whom have close links with or are members of the IHH, which itself allegedly has links with Hamas. And at least two of whom it is known had left behind notes wishing for martyrdom.
- If Hamas desires an end to the blockade, it must cease all terrorist activity and declare an intention to live in peace with Israel.

Last week's actions have clearly caused Israel serious diplomatic damage. The British Government rightly articulates the need for the people of Gaza to live in peace with all the sustenance and aid fundamental to the integrity and well being of any human being. These human rights are basic, cannot be ignored and must be resolved which is why our Government must not lose sight of Hamas' tyrannical rule and record of human rights abuses against ordinary Palestinian citizens in Gaza. Moreover the government has stressed its support for Resolution 1860 which calls on all member states (including the UK) to prevent illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition to Hamas. The best way to open the Gaza's borders is to procure an end to this trafficking.

Equally, the Board will continue its role in lobbying key ministers on the issue of Hamas' terrorist activity, so that the human rights of Israel's citizens are also valued and protected together with those of the people of Gaza.

Consensus amongst British Jews is that this is a heartbreaking situation, which is why our community cannot remain silent at this crucial time. We can all make a difference by ensuring that we are fully briefed, lobbying our MPs and other representatives and ensuring so far as we are able that Israel's case is put in the media. The Board will arrange briefings for Deputies both in person in Parliament and via email. In the meantime you may wish to visit the following websites:

[www.ipost.com](http://www.ipost.com)

[www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com)

[www.bicom.org.uk](http://www.bicom.org.uk)

[www.mfa.gov.il](http://www.mfa.gov.il)

[www.beyondimages.info](http://www.beyondimages.info)

[www.justjournalism.com](http://www.justjournalism.com)

[www.theisraelproject.org](http://www.theisraelproject.org)

[www.intokolisrael.com](http://www.intokolisrael.com)

[www.terrorism-info.org.il](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il)