

## **BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION STATEMENT ON RACISM & VIOLENCE IN GAZA**

By Bench Marks Foundation

16 October 2023

Of violence and racism in GAZA (2023)

This annual conference of the Bench Marks Foundation comprising church leaders, mining affected communities and activists meeting on 10 and 11 October, 2023 to deliberate on the critical minerals for the transition to green energy was disturbed and revolted by subsequent reports reaching us about the latest developments in Palestine (GAZA).

A disturbing picture from latest media reports was emerging showing retaliatory attacks from both the Israeli Defence Force and the armed Hamas militia leading to mayhem and destruction. These wanton attacks and destruction of homes, schools and other populated settlements need to come to an end. No amount of sabre-rattling from the USA and its allies in EU and predictably, NATO will bring about peace in the region.

It is within this context that the call was made to us to strengthen our solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle for freedom and national self-determination. As a faith-based organisation, working with the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), WE are proud to continue working alongside leaders of all the faiths to ensure a just peace in the holy lands.

Noting Further, the Israeli state's trade in (blood) diamonds as well as their theft of the water supplies of denies Palestinians a fair share of the drinkable water. This theft and iniquitous use of water supplies as it denies the Palestine people access thereto is also a denial of quality life. This practice sadly resonates with experiences in the extractive industries as documented and highlighted during the course of this conference.

Further submitting that it is important to be aware of the violence meted out by the Israeli regime on GAZA -a de facto landlocked strip of enclave and modern-day concentration camp-where bombing of buildings, workplaces and houses has resulted in the loss of lives that cannot be justified under international laws. Ordering the complete siege of the Gaza strip - as per the injunction of Yoav Gallant, the Israeli Defence Minister- with no food, no fuel, no electricity with everything closed is iniquitous and inhumane and indefensible irrespective of the reasons that called for or led to the "retaliation".

Noting further that Since the blockade of Gaza Strip in 2006 the people of Palestine have been engaged in continuous struggles to resist their subjugation and oppression. International law demands protection of all citizens and the failure to call out the Israeli state's violation of such prior to the Hamas attacks is opportunist as it is racist. Not surprisingly, the USA, the EU and other Western governments have lined up with the powerful against the weak and defenceless. Instead of seeking a sustainable and just peaceful solution, they vowed to continue policies and practices of attrition, vengeance and violence.

Israel continues to maintain exclusive control of Gaza's airspace and the territorial waters, just as it has since it occupied the Gaza Strip in 1967. This blockade is now in its 17th year, and the world powers have not spoken out against it. It is undeniable that the Israelis have effectively turned Gaza into the world's largest open-air prison. With over 2 million people living in a 45square kilometres space, Gaza is regarded as the most densely populated place in the world.

## THEREFORE RESOLVE

1. To call for an immediate end to all hostilities and the siege of GAZA.
2. To call for an end to the blockade of GAZA – an illegal act not justified under international laws.
3. To express our empathy with the people of Palestine and those in the Gaza in particular. We have lived for decades under Apartheid tyranny and oppression and we stand with you. When people live under occupation, tyranny and oppression we recognise your right and obligation to resist.
4. To call on the world and various elite mouthpieces to end duplicity when reporting of the struggles of Palestinians and call on you to affirm a commitment to justice and equality for all.
5. To call for an end to structural violence represented by the annexation and occupation of the Palestine territory by the Israeli state as well as the reiteration of the Palestinians' right to return, a right which is only available to Jewish people, whether they were born in Palestine or not.

*This press statement was released by Bench Marks Foundation ([www.benchmarks.org.za](http://www.benchmarks.org.za)) on 12 October 2023.*