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Lights off in Gaza – EU complicit with Israel

Providing a Voice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The situation in Gaza has taken another turn for the worse as the EU refuses to fund fuel supplies intended for Gaza's only power station and Israel refuses to deliver without payment. Although this has been reported in the Australian media, *Australians for Palestine* together with *Women for Palestine* deeply regret that there has been no word of condemnation from the Australian Government for what are deliberate obstructions to easing a humanitarian situation in extreme crisis.

Distressed by these ominous developments, Sonja Karkar, a spokesperson for both organisations was moved to ask, "Will the EU be the last to switch off the lights in Gaza or will it be the silent nod of the international community that plunges it into darkness? If governments around the world are not willing to call Israel to account for its grave violations against the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza - and worse still aid and abet Israel - then we are all culpable for the degradation and ultimate annihilation of Palestinian society."

Israel's closure of the border crossing over the last four days has stopped fuel supplies headed for Gaza's only power plant which was already seriously disabled when Israel bombed it in 2006. On Monday, it seemed that Israel had decided to re-open the crossing after pressure from the Palestinian provisional government in the West Bank, according to some reports. But then, the EU stepped in and instructed the Israeli fuel supplier not to deliver new supplies because payment could not be guaranteed. Israel now says that delivery of supplies will only be resumed if payment is forthcoming.

"These political games are having catastrophic consequences for the Palestinians in Gaza," said Mrs Karkar. "Tens of thousands of Palestinians had their power cut off just when they thought that Israel would allow delivery of fuel supplies after months of prolonged blackouts and restrictions. Now, it is impossible to pump water and sewage and hospitals will have to rely again on thoroughly inadequate generators to perform operations and run their medical equipment. With an economy already on the verge of irreversible collapse, massive food shortages, widespread malnutrition, the threat of starvation, fast-deteriorating health conditions, and constant Israeli military bombardments, the Palestinians are barely able to survive, and no one is saying anything."

Mrs Karkar went on to say that while the EU's actions are "immorally contributing to the crisis, Israel as an Occupying Power is ultimately responsible for the life and wellbeing of civilians in Gaza because it continues to control every aspect of their lives from outside. By refusing to allow the entry of fuel and basic goods into Gaza, Israel is inflicting collective punishment on the civilian population, which not only flagrantly violates the population's human rights, but also breaches international law."

Mrs Karkar had no hesitation in saying that the measures Israel is using to deny Palestinians a functioning power station "is unconscionable". And, that the EU's freezing of funds "is equally unconscionable".

Australians for Palestine and *Women for Palestine* call on the Australian Government to use its influence to seek Asian-Pacific regional support in order to put pressure on Israel to allow free passage of fuel and basic goods immediately to alleviate the crisis. As a member of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, Australia has a legal and moral obligation to ensure that Israel complies absolutely with its legal requirements to maintain the safety and wellbeing of the Palestinian population under its occupation

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