Israel's bombardment of Gaza killed over 1,300 Palestinians, a third of them children. Thousands have been wounded. Many victims had been taking refuge in clearly marked UN facilities.

This assault came in the wake of years of economic blockade by Israel. This blockade, which is illegal under International Humanitarian Law, has destroyed the Gaza economy and conditioned its population to poverty. According to a World Bank report last September, 97% of Gaza's industrial operations are inactive.

The most recent attack on Gaza is only the latest in a series of oppression of the Palestinian people and appropriation of their land.

Israel has never declared its borders. Instead, it has continuously expanded at the expense of the Palestinians. In 1948, it took over 78% of Palestine, an area much larger than that suggested for a Jewish state by the UN General Assembly in 1947. Contrary to International Law, Israel expelled over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. These refugees and their descendants, who now number millions, are still dispersed throughout the region. They have the right, under International Law, to return to their homes. This right has been underlined by the UN General Assembly many times, starting with Resolution 194 in 1948.

In 1967, Israel occupied the remaining 22% of Palestine: the West Bank and Gaza. Contrary to Article 49 of the Geneva Convention, Israel has built, and continues to build, settlements in these occupied territories. Today, nearly 500,000 Israeli settlers live in the illegal settlements in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and the number grows daily as Israel expands its settler programme.

Israel has resisted from the international community to abide by the human rights provisions of International Law. Israel has refused to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions and has continued to build settlements and remove those it has built (Resolutions 446, 452 and 465) and to reverse its illegal annexation of East Jerusalem (252, 267, 271, 298, 474 and 478). Since September 2000, over 5,000 Palestinians, almost 1,000 of them children, have been killed.

11,000,000 Palestinians, including hundreds of minors, languish in Israeli jails. Hundreds are detained without trial. In addition, Israel is breaking International Law by importing them outside the occupied territories, thereby making it almost impossible for their families to visit them. Every year, hundreds of Palestinian homes are demolished. The Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza lives imprisoned with walls, barriers and checkpoints that prevent or impede access to shops, schools, workplaces, hospitals and places of worship. They are subjected to restrictions of every kind and to daily ritual humiliation at the hands of occupation soldiers and checkpoint guards.

Invasion, occupation and plantation of their land is the reality that Palestinians have faced for decades and still live on a daily basis, as their country is reduced remorselessly. Unless, and until, the Israeli aggression is halted, and the democratic rights of the Palestinian people are vindicated, there will be no justice or peace in the Middle East. Israel's 40-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza must be ended.

The occupation can end if political and economic pressure is placed on the international community. Recognising this, the Palestinian people continually call on the international community to intervene.

We, the signatories, call for the following:

* The Irish Government to cease its purchase of Israeli military products and services and call for a boycott of Israeli products.

* The Irish Government to demand that Israel respect its own citizens, the Palestinians, and abide by International Law.

* The Irish Government to demand that Israel implement the recommendations of the Palestinian International Fact Finding Mission and call for an independent investigation into its conduct.

* The Irish Government to demand that Israel withdraw from all annexed territories and to affirm its commitment to the resolutions of the Security Council.

* The Irish Government to urge the United Nations to take action to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

* The Irish Government to support the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to bring about a just and lasting peace.

* The Irish Government to support the Palestinian people in their struggle for freedom and justice.

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