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The siege of Gaza has reached new levels of intensity. Israel has imposed an embargo that effectively blocks the delivery of fuel oil supplies to the strip. Thousands of homes in the territory have been left without power. The siege imposes enormous pressures on the most vulnerable members of the Palestinian communities. People live without light or heating in a bitter cold and wet winter. Bakers haven't been able to bake bread in the absence of fuel to fire their ovens. Unicef stated that the effect on Gaza city's main pumping station has resulted in 600,000 Palestinians not having access to safe drinking water. Hospitals are short of medical supplies and paralyzed by the power cuts. Medical infrastructure is on the verge of breakdown. UNRWA and others report that tens of people have already died because of the embargo.

As the **Arab Partnership for Conflict Prevention (APCP)**, a regional initiative of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), we urge the leaders of the world to take action on behalf of the people of Gaza, against collective traumatization of 1.5 million people, against the breaking of international treaties and against the inhumane treatment of fellow human beings. We ask the Israeli authorities to call off unconditionally its blockade on utilities and other basic goods transfer to Gaza and demand that the Palestinian Authority or an International Observer Force should be given full responsibility for the border controls with Gaza.

If the cycle of violence is to be broken, serious efforts for peace must be accompanied by efforts towards social justice. It is impossible to foster moderation and compromise, or build confidence through peaceful means of conflict resolution among Palestinians in the face of such brutal suppression.

The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that the Israeli government must restore electricity to health facilities and end restrictions on patients access to health care in Gaza. Exacerbating this state, the very habitat of the Palestinians is being destroyed: 30,000 cubic meters of sewage have been dumped in the Mediterranean untreated as a direct result of the embargo and Gaza's border closures are without example.

Israel has denied that it has created a humanitarian crisis. Any doubt about the impact of the siege has been removed by the huge mass, break-out of Palestinians through the Egyptian border to relieve their suffering at the end of January.

The collective punishment of civilian populations is specifically forbidden under International Law. The Geneva Convention clearly stipulates that occupying powers have an absolute obligation to supply captured territories with utilities such as fuel or water. The United Nations Security Council urged "Israel must reconsider and cease its policy of pressuring the civilian population of Gaza for the unacceptable actions of militants." (22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008)

The International Crisis Group noted that the siege of Gaza "is the most likely trigger for the next Arab-Israeli war." It is very likely that in the absence of a ceasefire with Hamas and the deficiency of peace talks in general, the situation will deteriorate.

We ask the Israeli state and the International Community to treat the Palestinians with dignity and compassion in order to foster moderation and empower those people who believe Palestine's future lies in a durable and sustainable peace. Efforts to reinstate the peace process, the building of civic institutions and the revival of the Palestinian economy are being emptied of any meaning and effect by the current situation in Gaza.

There has never been a more acute need to change the status quo in Gaza. Suppressed, hungry, unhealthy, traumatized and angry people will not make good partners in a peace process.

*The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a world-wide civil society-led network aiming to build a new international consensus on peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict. GPPAC works on strengthening civil society networks for peace and security by linking local, national, regional, and global levels of action and effective engagement with governments, the UN system and regional organizations.*