

# **A Letter from Israel: A Moment for Solidarity – Stand Up For Israel**

July 22, 2014

Dear Friends,

This is not a war that Israel wanted. Israel asked nothing of Gaza other than to be left alone. Israel has no territorial demands to win, nothing to prove and nothing materially to gain. This is a war in which the goal is to stop the fighting, the shelling, the rockets and the kidnapping attempts of Hamas.

The war began with air strikes intended to destroying launch sites and weapons caches. But air strikes have their limits. Military targets and weapons are placed in civilian areas resulting in the inability to distinguish between the terrorist and the terrorized. But the inability to discover and destroy tunnels from the air has forced the ground invasion.

In response to this “war that should not have been fought,” Israeli soldiers, kids in uniforms, are now being sent to destroy the underworld of Hamas, a complex web of tunnels dug to create subterranean access between Gaza and Israel. It is by way of these tunnels, dozens of which have already been destroyed and dozens remain to be discovered and destroyed, that terrorists can enter Israel with very specific goals: to kill Jews/Zionists, to kidnap soldiers or others and to terrorize this nation.

Israelis tell me that they are used to living beneath this sort of a cloud. They have endured so many wars and battles that the current situation is but another chapter in a familiar story. That is what they say, but I don't believe them. When children are killed, no experience from the past can soften the blow, alleviate or resolve the pain. And, in this war, we have arrived at that point: our children are being killed.

In Israel, everyone knows everyone. Or, if they don't know someone, they know someone who knows someone who knows that person. And when a soldier is killed, everyone seems to know that soldier, or his parents or his friend, or the friend of his friends. And so, when that soldier is killed, the entire nation is paralyzed by pain and sorrow. Today, Israel is a country in pain and in mourning.

A young American from Texas, a "lone soldier," was among the first fatalities. Yesterday, estimates put the number of people who attended his funeral at 20,000. Television and radio here have suspended their normal programming so that eulogies can be heard and funerals can be watched.

In the small "Yishuv"/ community where my daughter and son-in-law live, Oren Noach was a happy, affable and loving friend and son. At his funeral today, his father spoke of his love of his family, his friends and his devotion to Israel. When he enlisted, he chose to apply for, and was accepted into, an elite infantry unit. He was smart, well-liked and admired for his passion to serve Israel and protect her. The end came when the armored truck in which he was riding was ambushed and hit with antitank rockets which created a huge explosion and fire. There were over 2,000 people who came to today's funeral. The funeral was delayed due to the difficulty of identifying the parts which belonged to Oren and which belonged to the others.

Israel is reeling in pain tonight. It is the pain of fighting a war it did not want. Israel, tonight, lives with the pain of knowing that women and children will die as Israel eliminates its targets from the air. And tonight, all of Israel is in mourning for her children who have perished.

In a time of sadness and pain, the only elixir of which I am aware is that which comes from the knowledge that you are not alone in your pain and in your distress. In a world in which those who provoke war are the victims, those who use women and children as shields are morally superior and in a world in which those defending themselves from unprovoked attacks are the aggressors, there is a pervasive sense of loneliness. In this part of the world and, as you know, in many places of culture and tolerance, such as L.A., Boston and Paris, Israel is demonized and devalued and defamed. In a post-Holocaust world, Israel is again, alone and lonely. That is why I believe that it is so important to demonstrate your support of Israel.

Since I am in Israel, I must "stand up for Israel" here. But tomorrow you will have the chance to stand up for Israel in Philadelphia. As images from around the world showing anti-Israel and anti-Semitic demonstrations are viewed, it becomes increasingly important for Israel to see images and to hear words of solidarity and affection. Please know that your voices will be heard, your attendance will be noted and, through your presence, your message of support will be greatly appreciated here and everywhere that those who support Israel are feeling vulnerable.

To stand with Israel is not about politics. It is not about right and left, it is about right and wrong. Standing up for Israel in her time of need means to put aside for the moment those internal differences in order to come together and show that we are united in our support of and solidarity

with Israel. Were I not in Israel, I would surely be attending the rally. I hope that you will serve as my “shlichim”/proxies and go to the rally in my stead.

Standing with Israel from Israel...

B'Shalom,

Neil S. Cooper

Rabbi