

**Canadian Friends of Peace Now
Shalom Achshav Peace Foundation**

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NEWS

PEACE NOW URGES RENEWED TRUCE, OPPOSES GROUND OFFENSIVE

TORONTO--[December 29, 2008]

Canadian Friends of Peace Now today called upon Israel and Hamas to halt hostilities and begin indirect negotiations to renew their expired six-month ceasefire in order to avoid further civilian deaths on both sides of the Gaza border.

The Israeli government has a right and an obligation to defend its citizens against the relentless salvos of Qassam rockets that Hamas fired into the western Negev as the ceasefire expired. Israel has tried to minimize civilian casualties in its air strikes, but the loss of innocent life has been significant as Israeli warplanes bomb Hamas targets situated amid densely populated areas.

The destruction will become even worse, however, if Israel unleashes the full-scale ground offensive for which its tanks appear to have mobilized on the Gaza border. Such a ground war is unlikely to bring quiet to Sderot, Ashkelon and Netivot. After all, the militants were able to fire the Qassams even when Israel occupied the Gaza Strip. It would be folly for Israel even to consider reoccupying the territory.

Even short of that objective, however, a ground assault is likely to take an unacceptable toll, costing the lives of large numbers of innocent Palestinians and many Israeli soldiers.

As the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz said in an editorial: "Re-establishing the case-fire on better terms and with better supervision is a reasonable goal. Toppling the Hamas regime, or eradicating the last rocket factory where the last Hamas member is making the last Qassam rocket, are not reasonable goals, in part because they are unachievable without a prolonged presence on the ground in Gaza."

Another short-term ceasefire may be the best that can be engineered at this time of transition in the U.S. leadership, but once in office the Obama Administration will have to move beyond a tenuous truce and try to deal with the underlying dynamics of the conflict--Hamas's rejection of Israel's right to exist and Israel's occupation of the West Bank.