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Gaza: Cease-Fire Refusal Reckless and Totally Unacceptable

Brussels, 12 January 2009 (ITUC OnLine): The refusal of Israel and Hamas to accept the UN Security Council Resolution calling for a cease-fire is totally unacceptable, and will cost the lives of yet more innocent civilians, as Israel further escalates its military action and Hamas continues to fire rockets across the border. Israel has faced a barrage of international criticism for the conduct of its military campaign, including from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon who expressed "deep dismay" over mortar strikes on school buildings full of people seeking refuge from the fighting. Several UN agencies, along with the Red Cross, have also censured Israel for failing to respect international humanitarian law as medical workers have been denied access to wounded civilians, and aid workers and journalists have been killed or wounded. There have also been allegations, denied by Israel, that it has illegally used white phosphorus munitions in close proximity to civilians.

"Any such violations of international humanitarian law must be condemned in the strongest terms. In any case, the death and wounding of hundreds of innocent people is completely unacceptable," said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

Hundreds of civilians, including many children, have been killed since Israel's military incursion into Gaza began on 27 December, and hospitals in the besieged territory are struggling to cope with the more than 3,000 wounded. A total of nearly 900 people are already believed to have lost their lives.

"The UN Resolution gave a clear and balanced framework for an immediate cease-fire, yet both Israel and Hamas have refused to put it into effect, even though it deals with the immediate causes of the current fighting as well as the basis for achieving a just and durable peace. This refusal is reckless and deeply deplorable, and it is innocent civilians who will continue to pay the highest price for the failure of political leaders to commit to negotiations instead of bullets and bombs," said Guy Ryder.

The international community, especially those countries which have influence on Israel and Hamas must now engage effectively to push for an immediate cease-fire, and to bring the Israeli and Palestinian governments to the negotiating table.

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