

## **Our Statement on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict**

As we meet to discuss the plight of the people of Western Sahara and their quest for justice, our thoughts are also with those who are suffering from the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Although we are mindful of the 75 years during which Palestinians have been denied their human rights, we condemn the brutal murder of innocent Israeli civilians by members of Hamas. We do not believe that such atrocities can lead to a just and sustainable peace and to a society which respects the rights and dignity of all people and communities.

Nothing, however, can justify Israel's recent air strikes on Gaza. Thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed, thousands more are likely to perish in the coming days and weeks from lack of water, food, shelter and medical care, and the lives of hundreds of thousands have been torn apart by the destruction of their homes and the loss of their livelihoods.

Israel is committing war crimes on a colossal scale, yet our political leaders continue to offer Israel their political support. None have condemned Israel's atrocities and, while some have referred to international law, none have even threatened to use their economic and political leverage to bring the killing to an end.

We therefore call on our politicians to:

- Demand that both Israel and Hamas observe an immediate cease-fire;
- Demand the release of hostages held by Hamas and of Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel;
- Intensify their efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict;
- Urge international partners to work with and through the UN towards a new initiative to bring peace and security to the region by ensuring that the rights of the Palestinians and the Israelis are equally respected;

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is not a new one – it is a product of decades of oppression of the Palestinian people and the denial of their national aspirations. That conflict could have been resolved many years ago if the international community had used its influence and powers to ensure that all parties respect the principles of the United Nations and comply with its decisions.

The conflict between Western Sahara and Morocco may be smaller in scale, but there are too many parallels. In spite of UN resolutions and declarations on the universality of human and political rights, the international community has not defended the rights and freedoms of the Saharawis. In calling for immediate action to end the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, we also call on our leaders to address the oppression of the Saharawis now in order that a just, political solution can be found without the need for the violence we are seeing in the Middle East.