

## FAQ

*What is the Chicago Faith Coalition's objection to H. Res. 867?*

The Chicago Faith Coalition objects to the way H. Res. 867 was handled, without any kind of comprehensive discussion or hearing. We find the resolution's condemnation of the UN Fact Finding Mission's report, its originating committee and Justice Richard Goldstone, its author, to be very serious and even rash in the absence of any rigorous public debate on the actual content of the report. We believe that any such condemnation from the US Congress should only come cautiously and learnedly, especially in this specific context of the war in Gaza, during which there was unacceptable loss of innocent life and damage to civilian infrastructure.

*But Judge Goldstone responded to the resolution and his response was rebutted by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Isn't that discussion enough?*

We at the Chicago Faith Coalition believe that a much fuller and more publicly available discussion was warranted by the seriousness of the claims in the Justice Goldstone's report and by his credentials prior to this incident. Considering how damaging to Justice Goldstone's reputation the current campaign to discredit his report has been, we believe that preventing him from adequately defending himself and the report was a discredit to basic American values.

*So if there had been more of a discussion on this resolution, that would have been enough?*

Not quite. The Chicago Faith Coalition firmly believes that robust discussion on such important issues is crucial, but not enough to ensure that future tragedies are avoided. We hold that there are findings and suggestions within the report that must not be cast aside due to questions about the origin of the report itself.

*But wasn't the report and the UN council that authorized it biased, making all of its findings illegitimate?*

It is our position that any alleged bias of the report does not actually render all of its findings illegitimate. Particularly the call for independent investigations by both sides. While we do not find that the report was particularly biased, we insist that regardless of its credibility, the report's call for independent investigations to determine whether war crimes were committed is absolutely essential to ensuring this does not happen again. As a moral imperative, we cannot stand idly by if there exists even the most remote possibility that some of these very serious charges are accurate. For instance, accusations from Iran that the IAEA is biased should not have the power to derail its investigation into Iranian breaches of its agreement. The role of the US in promoting consistent accountability is indispensable to eliminating the culture of impunity, where the leaders involved in the conflict feel that they are exempted from examination, judgment and condemnation.

*Culture of impunity? I can see that with Hamas, but how is this true of Israel?*

We agree that the inability of Hamas to guarantee that Qassam rockets would only hit military targets is likely a war crime and therefore indicative of a culture of impunity. However, according to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, Israel engaged in attacks both in Gaza and the West Bank during the cease fire preceding the invasion that endangered and even ended civilian lives. We make no claim as to which side had the initial responsibility for provoking the other, because to do so is useless and

counterproductive. Hence to place the entire blame on Hamas for that period promotes the exact same culture of impunity on the Israeli side. We believe that this culture of impunity is morally as well as pragmatically detrimental to all parties involved.

*But this is a completely unbalanced situation. Militants in Gaza were firing upon Israel from civilian areas.*

We agree that this situation lacks any semblance of balance. It is so futile to compare the experiences on both sides that the only remaining alternative is to approach the situation from basic principles. Above all, civilian deaths are wrong no matter where they occur and all steps must be taken to avoid them. Hamas clearly did not meet this moral minimum but neither did Israel. Independent investigations are one of the most important steps to avoid such a tragedy in the future.

*What alternative did Israel have? doesn't the report make the disturbing implication that Israel did not have the right to defend itself from attack?*

According to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, both sides engaged in breaches of the ceasefire that preceded the attack on Gaza. The Chicago Faith Coalition firmly believes that both sides had substantial alternatives to the action they chose both before and during the attack. An international peace keeping force manning the checkpoints as a prominent example. Regardless of what could have been done, we believe that the same rights should extend to both Israelis and Palestinians. If one had the right to military defense, so did the other, and both must be held to the same moral minimum mentioned above. Only an independent investigation can impartially measure their adherence to such standards.

*But how can an independent investigation take place if, as in the case of the UN report, Hamas simply intimidates civilians to give predetermined testimony?*

While we cannot rule out that the leadership in Gaza is responsible for some attempts to obscure of what really happened, this charge can be equally laid on both sides. We point to the efforts to silence and discredit those soldiers associated with Breaking the Silence on the Israeli side as evidence of intimidation on the Israeli side. A thorough investigation will take these factors into account.

*The situation is clearly very complicated and must ultimately be resolved by the parties involved. What effect could US Congressional action possibly have now?*

The possibility that obstruction of justice is taking place on both sides is further evidence of the culture of impunity previously mentioned. This culture can be severely disrupted by a clear and consistent call from the US for both sides to submit to independent investigations to determine whether war crimes were committed in the armed conflict of December 2008 and January 2009. To present such a consistent position would act as a deterrent against future abuses in a conflict in which each side relies so heavily on its international legitimacy.