

My Personal Experience

Submitted

To members of the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict,

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and Dr. Doudou Diène**

By email to coigaza@ohchr.org

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This Submission is not confidential

A Friday Night (Shabat) Meal in Israel

The following letter was sent to friends and family following a Friday meal on Friday 25th July 2015. It was eventually seen by tens of thousands of people (if not more) as recipients sent to their friends and family. Eventually, it came to the attention of several publications who proceeded to publish my letter in their newspapers.

“Last Friday night, I returned from synagogue in Israel, sat down for the main meal of the week, our shabat meal, made kiddush, the blessing over wine, hamotzi, the blessing over the bread and enjoyed the chicken soup. Sounds familiar? This scene was happening throughout the Jewish world. Nothing special out of the ordinary has occurred so far.

What happened next is unusual except perhaps if you live in Israel. We live in Kfar Sava, about 80 kilometres from northern Gaza (Israel is a small country). As my wife, Vivienne, prepared to serve the main course, the rocket warning siren went off. Our apartment, built after the Iraqi war of 1991 and the Scud attacks (it is never boring in these parts of the globe) has a bomb shelter. We had 45 seconds to get there.

Who was with us? Vivienne`s 90 year old mother, with a walker, had to be uprooted from her seat at the table and slowly accompanied to the bomb shelter. Our daughter, Shiri`s, son is 15 months and was sleeping in an upstairs apartment. His father raced up the steps - he had to be woken, fetched and taken to the bomb shelter. Even Shiri`s dog (whining and hiding under the dining room table) needed to be dragged to the bomb shelter. Somehow we made it in time and moments after we closed the steel door and window, the rocket exploded with a deafening roar quite close by, probably intercepted by the Iron Dome defense battery. We needed to remain in the bomb shelter for about 10 minutes in case shrapnel fell from the rocket. There have been several rocket warnings in Kfar Sava when we needed to race to our bomb shelter but this was the first during a shabat meal. Luckily there were no casualties or damage to buildings. Unfortunately our delicious main course had to be eaten cold.

When in your part of the world you read or see on TV that a rocket has been launched, please be aware that people are interrupting their daily routine and running for shelters. This has happened on average 140 times daily in different parts of central and southern Israel since July 8 2014.

Please give a thought to the folk in the south of Israel, about 1 million with about 250,000 children, who have lived under these conditions, with several rockets a day, for 9 years. These folk, the elderly with their walkers, the handicapped with their wheelchairs, the infants in their prams, all have 15 seconds to get to their bomb shelter. Frankly, enough is enough.”

The Commission is invited to ask of itself and answer honestly:

Why is it that Israel has to prepare bomb shelters in public places?

Why is it compulsory for Israelis to have bomb shelters in their homes?

Are there any other countries where each new home must have a bomb shelter by government order?

Against whom must Israel and Israelis take precautions?

Was the rocket which interrupted the dinner of civilians and aimed at civilians a war crime (there are no military bases in our city or even the area)?

Were not all the other approximately 15,000 rockets each aimed at civilians also war crimes?

Is it not correct that an organization that solely aims its rockets at civilians in order to achieve political ends be described as a terrorist organization?

Will the Commission be making recommendations as to how countries should deal with terrorist organizations?

If we assume that building costs in Israel are \$1500 per square meter, that the average size of the bomb shelter is 30 square meters and that about 1,000,000 (about 40,000 annually) apartments and homes have been built since 1991, should not Hamas be responsible to refund this expense? (\$45,000,000,000)? This excludes the cost of bomb shelters in schools, public places and hospitals.

Since Hamas initiated the firing of rockets on Israel`s civilian population and since the firing of rockets on Israel`s civilian population was Hamas`s strategy, in fact, its only strategy, surely any reasonable organization would have anticipated retaliation?

If Hamas anticipated retaliation, why did it not take precautions to safeguard its population in the same way that Israel is compelled and Israelis are compelled to take all necessary precautions?

Does the Commission agree with the Egyptian`s court decision of 31 January 2015 to declare Hamas a terrorist organization?

[(Reuters) - An Egyptian court on Saturday banned the armed wing of Palestinian group Hamas and listed it as a terrorist organization, a ruling in keeping with a systematic crackdown on Islamists by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.]

And finally:

Can I feel assured that, as a result of the Commissions findings and recommendations:

as a 70 year old civilian, in future my personal safety will be enhanced;

as a civilian, future dinners and/or normal daily activities will not be subject to interruption due to the firing of rockets; and

my grandchildren will be able to build new homes without bomb shelters?