

**Ta'anit Tzedek  
Jewish Fast For Gaza**

**The First Fast, July 16, 2009**

**Transcript of Conference Call**

**With**

**Mona Abu Ramadan  
And  
Dr. Sara Roy**

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### **first-fast-7-16-09**

Mona abu Ramadan is our first presenter. She is the program for the American Near East Refugee Aid Milk for Preschoolers program in Gaza, which provides 20,000 preschool daily with daily fortified snacks and a full package of child education, teacher training, hearing and vision testing, and nutritional assessment and growth monitoring of children. [Ms. Abu Ramadan] has a master's in business administration from Palestine University in Gaza and a bachelor's degree in pharmacy from Cairo University.

We have encouraged fasters to contribute to this fund. And we are so blessed to have Mona on the call with us. And we're really grateful to you, to share some words about the reality of the program -- the reality in Gaza and her program. So, please, Mona, if you would share some words, we would be honored to hear them.

Mona abu Ramadan: Thank you. First, I would thank all people who worked on this event. Thank you, Rabbi Walt and Rabbi Rosen for inviting me to participate in this activity of Ta'anit Tzedek, Jewish Fast for Gaza.

Talking about the Milk for Preschoolers program, implemented by ANERA, it provides a daily, fortified snack of milk and biscuit to more than 20,000 needy children, age 3-years-old to 5-years-old attending at 180 preschools located in needy and marginalized areas of the Gaza Strip. Now, more than half of these children suffer from

malnutrition due to severe poverty, which is manifested in the high prevalence of anemia, stunting, and wasting at very alarming rates.

At the start of the school year, 2008-2009, the milk program conducted a nutritional assessment study. And [anemia] rates among the children was 40 percent. At the end of the school year and after eight months of daily nutrition, the program managed to reduce this rate to only 19 percent.

Now, the daily snack of fortified milk and biscuit contains a group of micronutrients, like iron and zinc, among other vitamins and minerals essential for fighting anemia and stunting and for helping these children to grow normally. This nutrition comes in a complimentary package of training for the teachers on concepts like healthy nutrition, personal hygiene, and psychosocial support for the children.

The program also provides awareness-raising sessions for the mothers of the preschoolers on the same topics. And the role of mothers and caregivers to children is very important for implementing the program and achieving the best result with the children. And the program also conducts monitoring and year-end screening for these children.

The Milk for Preschoolers program provides an ideal environment for the child, from good nutrition, hygiene, education to lesson plans and health messages and behavior change. The teachers are

trained; mothers' awareness raised [a whole], healthy environment for the child. And all this cost per child is from \$60 to \$70 for the whole year.

Now, the Palestinian families in Gaza mainly subsist on low-quality food which is filling, but not healthy. Jobless parents wait for occasional food rations donated by humanitarian organizations. And during focus groups and meetings with mothers, most of them say they feed their children with bread and tea, the only things they find. And sometimes they boil potatoes with meatless [bones]. They cannot afford milk, meat, or any kind of fruit. So the daily children diet lacks both the macronutrients and micronutrients essential for their normal body growth.

And about the context within which an average Palestinian child lives here in Gaza . . . he lives with a crowd of 11 or 12 people who are usually his brothers, sisters, parents, and grandmother maybe or grandfather in the same room, having [asbestos] ceiling. The room happens to be kitchen at the same time. And the children sleep on rugs and on thin, poor quality mattresses on the floor. Usually, the same bathroom is shared between three to four families living in the same crowded area. Imagine around 25 or 30 people having to use the same bathroom every day. The idea is that, due to disease and extreme poverty, the situation in Gaza is becoming way [below the devastation] due to this continuous siege, which affects all aspects of life.

About the psychosocial status of the -- or the psychological status of the children, we observed that they do not smile anymore, especially after the war. Drawings of children always contain different kinds of planes, different kinds of missiles falling from the sky, tanks, demolished houses, [strewn] bodies, and dead people, ambulances, etc. And, also, nocturnal [unintelligible] became common between common between children until the age of 14-years-old.

And the preschool children often cry and get scared when they see strangers visiting the preschool. They get scared when they hear a plane or when a door [collapses]. The flashback of the war memories keep coming back with each of these stimuli.

The children of Gaza lost many already: they lost their heads; and, still, they live in tents near the rubble of their houses. Others lost their aunts, brothers, sisters, or uncles. They lost their school bags, and they lost their toys and clothes, everything they once owned. So the children are confused, shy, and oppressed.

A child lives in a home which is not his home. He uses other people's belongings. And the problem is that we still have the rubble of demolished buildings many months now. And the rubble is still in the same place, no chance for reconstruction of the houses or the schools due to the siege on Gaza. No construction materials are allowed. And this is among other things which are not allowed.

And this siege on Gaza is [inhumane] and targets all society sectors. They are victims who had no contribution in all the ongoing political debates, either local, national, or international. As a worker in [human relief], I talk with a [pure] human perspective. I wish to [neutralize] the vulnerable groups as children, women, and elderly, as well as people with health problems from any [consequences] of these debates, especially from the inhuman siege.

We at ANERA try to overcome the difficulties in working in a context like Gaza by being determined on implementation of projects, like the Milk for Preschoolers program, which provides daily, healthy nutrition to the needy children in Gaza. And here I would like to thank all the humanitarian organizations working in Gaza. We pride [on] being one of them. And we complement each other in overcoming the siege from a human perspective.

Especially, I would like to thank all the Jewish people in the world who feel the bitterness of living of people in Gaza due to the siege, which, as I mentioned, has no mercy for the young or old. And, at the end, I wish from all countries and governments of the world to seriously consider our human cause in Gaza and to start acting. I hope the borders will be removed and all people hearing us would come to Gaza and see with their own eyes what a tragedy Gaza people live in and how they daily suffer from the siege. Thank you.

Rabbi Brian Walt: Thank you so much. Thank you. Well, it's obviously -- we've now got a very real picture of the human face of the issue that we're

dedicated to addressing. And I think it's really important to start with that human face.

Many of us -- I speak for myself -- have seen children on both sides and have seen children in Israel who are traumatized by this conflict. And to know that children on both sides are [in that] these children are the victims of the inability that we have as adults to make -- to reconcile differences and to negotiate a decent and just living for all people.

I really appreciate so much, Mona, you being on the call. I wish there were a lot of time for us to ask you questions. I want to urge everyone who is on this call to consider giving a contribution today to the Milk for Preschoolers campaign of the American Near Eastern Refugee Aid.

And you can go to our Web site, and, on the homepage, if you scroll down to the fast, there's a link to the Milk for Preschoolers program near the bottom third of that page. If you link on that, you can go right there, and you can make a contribution. And you may want to think of giving a contribution of \$60 to \$70, which, according to what Mona has just told us, would provide the milk and the biscuits for a year for one child in Gaza if you're able to do that, or some multiple of that, or some amount of money that's as much as you can. So I want to thank Mona; and thank you so much for being on here. I also want to --

Mona abu Ramadan: You're welcome.

Rabbi Brian Walt: -- thank Bill Corcoran who is the president of ANERA who called us and helped to make this call happen and I believe is one of the listeners on this call. And we hope, Mona, that we -- our fast will help to lift the siege and that it will help inspire us and other people to see the humanity of all people and to see the humanity of the people in Gaza and to end what you rightly call this collective punishment that affects all people in Gaza and is immoral and unjust, regardless of the political realities that exist in the region.

So I want to make a transition. It's a bit hard talking here without receiving any feedback from people; so I hope it's working. In 1987, I met Sara Roy when I invited her to speak as a young rabbi then in [Congregation Beth Israel] in Media, Delaware County. Dr. Sara Roy is a senior research scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University where she completed her doctoral studies in international development and education.

Trained as a political economist, Dr. Roy has worked in the Gaza strip and the West Bank since 1985 conducting research primarily on the economic, social, and political development of the Gaza Strip and on U.S. foreign aid in the region. Dr. Roy is the author of several books on Gaza, many articles, and speaks widely on this issue. Her most recent book is "Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict." She's currently completing a book, "Between Extremism and Civism: Political Islam in Palestine."

Lastly, and perhaps as importantly as the academic credential, because I'm so pleased we started with the [heart], I feel it's hard for me not to try hearing the report that we just heard. Dr. Roy is also a committed Jew, a child of Holocaust survivors, who has written movingly about the relationship between her own personal family history and the work she does as an advocate for understanding and justice for the people in Gaza. Dr. Roy will speak for some 20 minutes and then answer some questions probably for another 10 to 15 minutes. So thank you so much, Dr. Roy, for joining us. And we're really honored that you're on this call.

Dr. Sara Roy: Thank you very much, Brian. Before I begin, I would like to say too that, for me, this is a -- it is an honor and privilege to be part of the Jewish Fast for Gaza. Ethics are the core of who we are as a people. I have always and deeply believed that. Speaking out against cruelty and injustice and, by doing so, bearing witness and refusing silence is an ethical and moral imperative and one that we as a people are embracing with this fast.

My mother was the daughter of an Orthodox rabbi in [pre-War] Poland. And all the many beautiful stories she told me about him spoke of an individual who understood and practiced Judaism, not only as a form of religious belief, but as a living framework for principled and ethical action. That is how my mother and father lived their lives and how they inspired me to live mine. So I just wanted to make those personal comments to begin.]

Now, what I'd like to do in the minutes that I have is to give the listeners a sense of some of the critical changes, what I call paradigmatic shifts in the way that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is conceptualized, understood, and addressed. This is -- these changes are in my view very important to understand because they represent some very serious and, I think, dangerous shifts in the way that the conflict is approached and has been approached for the last few years.

Now, since the beginning of Israeli occupation, there has always been an implicit, not an explicit, assumption or belief among Palestinians, Israelis, and many members of the international community that the occupation can and will end; and Israel's expansion into Palestine will be stopped. Now, for many this was how they understood the Oslo process -- or the Oslo Peace Process that began in '93.

The belief that occupation is reversible and should be reversed was largely unquestioned and uncontested and was the catalyzing force behind many social, economic, and political initiatives. Now this belief that occupation and the forces that sustain can and should be stopped has itself been reversed and is powerfully illustrated in the formalization and institutionalization and acceptance by Israel and critically by the international community of Palestinian territorial and demographic fragmentation and cantonization. And this

represents a key paradigm shift in the way that the conflict is understood and approached.

Now, the changes imposed on Palestinians over the last 15 years, especially, have shown that the occupation cannot be stopped, at least not in the shorter median term. And if the occupation has changed over time, it is in the sheer nature of its expansion and force and not in its mitigation or contraction.

Now, the effect, of course, on Palestinians has been extremely damaging. Today, conservatively speaking, Palestinians in the West Bank have lost at least 38 percent of their land, which is now under Israeli control and inaccessible to them. And, also, Arab lands are being incorporated and consolidated into a new spatial and political order that aims to eliminate any physical separation between Israel and certain areas of the West Bank, diminishing the presence of Palestinians and precluding the emergence of any kind of viable entity that could be called a Palestinian state.

Now, the denial of territorial contiguity within the West Bank and also between Gaza and the West Bank is a critical fact. And what many people don't understand is that by 1998, during the Oslo -- during the period of the Oslo process, the West Bank and Gaza had -- the separation of the two territories had been virtually completed by 1998. So you have series of changes, very dramatic and very pernicious changes, that have been imposed in the last few years. And these changes have now not only come to define reality for

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, but have come to be accepted as the legitimate and "normal" status quo.

Now, this points to another important paradigm shift, and that is that prior to the Oslo Peace Process there was a belief among Israelis and within the international community that peace and occupation were incompatible. The former, peace, could not be achieved in the presence of the latter, occupation. And this too has changed.

In recent years, more and more Israelis are benefiting from the occupation. Their lives have been facilitated by the vast settlement road network built in the West Bank by an improved economy resulting from a perceived containment of the conflict. Settlements are considered natural outgrowths. And the links between the settlements and Israel proper is considered by many to be a familial one. So our integration of settlement blocks and their infrastructure into Israel -- that is, the argument that the West Bank -- or parts of the West Bank are part of Israel and should be -- is no longer extraordinary or contentious; on the contrary, it has become necessary and normal.

So for many Israelis and several key international donors, it's no longer a question of normalizing the occupation, but of removing the term altogether since it no longer applies, especially in light of a strong and expanding Israeli economy and the virtual cessation of suicide attacks inside Israel. So Palestine's [effective]

dismemberment and the permanence of territorial fragmentation are accepted, as I said, as legitimate and benign and totally manageable. So separating from Palestinians and doing what is necessary politically, militarily, and economically to ensure and maintain that separation has also become increasingly routine.

Now, the inapplicability of occupation as an analytical framework leads to another important paradigm shift regarding Israel's intentions towards the Palestinians and their territories. And this shift is from one of ongoing occupation to one of annexation and imposed sovereignty, again, claiming that the West Bank or parts of it are de facto, sovereign Israeli territory. And the shift, of course, is illustrated by many policies that I don't need to get into, among them the building of the Separation Wall, the confiscation of Palestinian lands, settlement expansion, settlement infrastructure expansion.

And it's also the subsequent reshaping of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to center on Gaza alone and on Israel's hostile relationship with Hamas. A critical feature of this reshaping has been the transformation of Palestinians into a humanitarian as opposed to a political issue, which I'll discuss in a moment, and the identification of Gaza fully with Hamas, and, therefore, as [alien].

So the conflict -- and, again, this represents another key shift -- is now conceived and articulated in terms of Israel's hostile relationship with Gaza, hence, Hamas. And the West Bank in a

sense is left out of the conceptualization because, unlike Gaza, the West Bank has been pacified and subdued by land confiscations, by settlement expansions, by compliant Palestinian leadership that accepts the state of [clohan] and supports it; so, again, another [carat].

So within this paradigm, or within this new paradigm, Palestinians become aliens and intruders in their own land, living in submission and dependence. And any notion of human community among Palestinians, let alone a national or economic one, ceases to exist. And, of course, nowhere is this more evident than in Gaza. And the paradigmatic shift from occupation to annexation has also been accepted by key members of the international community, especially after Hamas' electoral victory and seizure of Gaza in January of 2006 and June of 2007, respectively. And the acceptance and support of these changes by the international community is new and absolutely critical to perpetuating this very egregious situation.

Now, transforming Palestinians into perpetrators without claim has assumed different dimensions since the election of Hamas, particularly with regard to the changing nature of physical destruction in the West Bank, which represents another critical change. Now, the Israeli journalist Amira Hass has described a steady process of destroying many vestiges of Palestinian life in the West Bank as they've historically existed. Old roads long used by Palestinians traveling between major towns and surrounding villages are being eliminated, as are traditional intersections,

buildings, and certain commercial areas, this of course on top of all the settlement expansion and settlement infrastructural expansion.

And another illustration concerns certain road signs in the West Bank, which now have the Hebrew names of towns transliterated into Arabic and the Arabic name encased in parenthesis, which I think is a very symbolically powerful illustration of what I'm talking about. So what is happening is no less than the erasure of a Palestinian presence in the West Bank.

Now, if we look at some of the paradigm shifts at the level of the economy -- and here I'm going to focus on Gaza -- we see some, also, very startling and dramatic changes. Now, in 2007, a colleague of mine who is an economist in Ramallah said to me, "We started with food aid, and we've returned to food aid." And I think her words powerfully capture what is perhaps the most dramatic paradigm shift in the way Palestinians are perceived and addressed; and that is from a society worthy of pursuing developmental change to an impoverished community seeking relief, what a friend of mine in Gaza recently called engineering Palestinians into perpetual beggars.

Now, the resulting [humanitarianization] and immiseration of Palestinians, in effect, turning Palestinians into charity cases and paupers, has many illustrations, especially in Gaza. In Gaza, for example, between 1999 and early 2008, the number of families food aid from [UNRWA], which is the UN agency responsible for the

refugee community, the number of families receiving food aid increased from roughly 16,000 families in 1999 to 182,000 families in 2008. Today, at least 80 percent of the Gaza population is dependent on some form of assistance, food assistance, to survive. And other sources put this number as high as 96 percent. Virtually the entire population of Gaza has been transformed into aid-dependent paupers.

Now, the shift from political to humanitarian priorities derives from several factors. Two of the most important in my view are the total fragmentation of the geographical base of the Palestinian economy, with the complete separation of Gaza and West Bank and the division of the West Bank into at least 11 cantons and sub-cantons. And, also, this transformation from political to humanitarian derives from the use of the aid as a form of punishment inflicted by Israel in the form of closure and blockade and, critically, by the international community as well; hence, the steady imposition of Israeli imperatives unchallenged by the international community and now actively supported by that community, coupled with the use of aid as a punitive weapon gave rise several years ago to a clear shift in the way that foreign governments and some international organizations approached Israel-Palestinian relations. And this shift too was clear after the January, 2006 elections that brought Hamas to power.

And the shift moved away, moved strongly away from any commitment to Palestinian self-determination toward one that

emphasized relief and charity, helping people survive while they are being contained and punished and their economy disabled. So, again, Palestinians are reduced to a demographic presence in small and impoverished enclaves, both in the West Bank, of course, and in Gaza and to be treated as a humanitarian issue for the international community to look after, unable to mobilize politically or economically and demoted to statelessness in their own homes.

And, yet, this transformation or paradigm shift that reduces Palestinians in this way, from a political to a humanitarian issue, has been accompanied by another equally dangerous policy shift. Now, since the Hamas victory in January of 2006, Israel's policy goal is no longer just the isolation of Gaza, but its disablement, as seen in [a] shift that addresses the economy in some manner, whether it's positively or negatively, to one that dispenses with the concept of an economy altogether; that is, rather than weaken Gaza's economy through punishing closures and other restrictions, as it has long done, the Israeli government has, since 2006 in particular, imposed a form of indefinite blockade and siege, replacing closure in effect, that treats the economy as totally irrelevant, as a disposable luxury.

This was underlined by the Israeli [supreme court's] decision, first approving fuel cuts to Gaza in October of 2007, which they said was permissible since it would not harm the essential humanitarian needs of the population. And this was followed in January of 2008 by electricity cuts and in May, 2008 by a lowering of acceptable

levels for fuel and electricity. Now, the court stated -- and this is very important -- "We do not accept the [petitioners'] argument that marked forces should be allowed to play their role in Gaza with regard to fuel consumption." Thus, according to the supreme court, it is permissible to harm Palestinians and create a humanitarian crisis for political reasons or, as the analyst Darryl Li has put it, the logic of the court's decisions on fuel and electricity suggest that once undefined, essential humanitarian needs are met all other deprivation is possible.

So it is no longer and, in fact, has not been for quite some time a question of economic growth, change, or reform, freedom or sovereignty, but of essential humanitarian needs of reducing the needs and rights of 1.4 million people in Gaza to an exercise in counting calories and food trucks. So this in turn, I think, points to another critical shift and that is the new and unprecedented level of acuity facing the Palestinian economy and society. Now, if there has been a powerful and consistent theme among the many people - - Palestinians, Israelis, and internationals -- that I've interviewed in the last three years before the war on Gaza, it is this: that the situation in Gaza and the West Bank is rapidly approaching a watershed in terms of the damage inflicted on the individual, the family, and the community. The fear of unabated and irreversible decline is deep and unprecedented and directed to the fact that Palestinians are approaching and, in fact, they have now approached, especially in Gaza, a degree of damage that will take billions of dollars and generations of Palestinians to address.

This theme is echoed in many reports by the World Bank and various UN agencies. In fact, there's a plethora of literature on this now if people are interested. This reality has many illustrations, some of which I've just described, others that I don't have the time to describe. But I would like to give you just a few statistics here from a more human point of view that will hopefully illustrate what I'm saying. You have a population in Gaza and the West Bank, or nearly 75 percent -- and I suspect the number is higher -- of its member now suffer from severe depression, where 75 percent of all those injured between September of 2000 and September of 2008 were between 10-year-old and 29-year-old and were 62 percent of those killed, between September 2000 and June 2008 were between 15-years-old and 29-years-old.

Economically, socially, and demographically, it is impossible to outrun the reality of Gaza and the West Bank. And I would like to conclude with one final point. The devastation of Gaza that we saw last December and also the very terrible, egregious patterns and policies that are being implemented in the West Bank are not discreet events without history or context, despite the fact that they are consistently portrayed that way. The war on Gaza, for example, did not emerge in a vacuum, but is a tragic, though inevitable, part of a far larger context of prolonged Israeli occupation and colonization that preceded Hamas by decades and would undeniably continue should Hamas disappear from the map tomorrow. And it the occupation and all that underlies it that is the

fundamental reason for Palestinian resistance and will remain so until the occupation ends. Thank you.

Rabbi Brian Walt: Thank you. Thank you, Sara. So I think that's a real challenging presentation we heard. And, also, I'm so blessed -- we are blessed that Dr. Roy brings to it the expertise of an economist and a political economist to examine the shifts in the level of oppression that's going on in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And what I wanted to do for the next 10 or 15 minutes is ask a few questions that I think have been asked of us and that I'd like you, Sara, to address.

Dr. Sara Roy: Okay.

Rabbi Brian Walt: The first one I want to ask is, of course, you portray -- the way you portrayed this was that Israel has a policy that's now beyond occupation . . . [is] really incorporation of this territory, as you put it, and also of making the entire Palestinian population into a charity case, essentially.

But many people say that the reason for this crisis doesn't lie in Israel at all; the reason for the crisis is a simple reason: the reason is the refusal by Hamas to recognize Israel; and the second reason is that Hamas has encouraged and allowed and organized constant rocket attacks. The argument is, if Hamas were to stop the attacks and to want to live with Israel in peace and to recognize Israel, the

problem would be resolved tomorrow. How do you respond to that argument?

Dr. Sara Roy: Well, first of all, I concluded this talk by saying that we have to understand this conflict within a historical context. We can't -- if you treat it as a discreet event, or a series of discreet events, of course we can't understand the many different dynamics that fuel it and the reasons why things happen the way they do.

Now, as I said, if Hamas were to disappear from the map tomorrow, this occupation and Israeli control would continue. The issue -- one, of course, can go back a long way. And I'm not going to do that here. But let me -- having said that, having made the point that historical context [and] looking at this thing within a historical framework is absolutely essential -- now, this argument, of course, is very prominent, the one that you just -- the question that you've just made -- or the argument that the greatest obstacle to peace is Hamas' unwillingness and refusal not only to recognize Israel, but to honor past agreements, past peace agreements.

Now, of course, first of all, when people who levy these accusations at Hamas neglect to say that the conditions imposed upon Hamas for entering negotiations, so-called, are imposed entirely by Israel and by the United States. And this is a situation where Palestinians are not being engaged as equal partners or as actors with a position of their own and needs and interests that they have a right to articulate. They are expected, as they've long been, as the Oslo

Process, in fact, virtually institutionalized, to respond to the demands and the positions and the terms imposed upon them by Israel and the U.S.

Now, Hamas argues that recognition of Israel would be equivalent to recognizing occupation and the various events that have led up to occupation, which -- and would not only be equivalent to recognizing occupation, but to legitimizing what happened to them from 1948 on, which it steadfastly refuses to do, particularly against a history of Palestinian concessions during the Oslo period made by Yasser Arafat that not only failed to end Israeli occupation, but deepened it and expanded it.

So they have the example of hindsight here. And they can look at the various concessions that were made by previous leaderships and see that the outcome of those concessions not only failed to improve the Palestinian position, but worsened it dramatically.

Now, statehood in the absence of sovereignty, which the PLO agreed to, was an illusion. Recognition of Israel as a precondition of negotiations was criticized, in fact, by none other than Ephraim Halevy, who was the former head of Israel's [intelligent] Mossad service, who stated -- in effect, he said that the demand for an a priori renunciation of ideology before negotiations or before any kind of political contact has never been made before, either to an Arab state or to the PLO. And so this condition is being imposed not to initiate negotiations or a diplomatic process of some kind, but

just for -- precisely because the Israeli knows this is a non-starter for Hamas.

But, more importantly, I think it's important to look at the record. Let's see what Hamas has said. Now, if Israel is seriously interested in engaging Hamas and pursuing a diplomatic process of negotiation toward some sort of resolution of the conflict, Hamas has made it clear -- in fact, Hamas has made it clear since the late '80s -- that it is prepared to engage Israel politically in this process.

Now, Hamas, for example, voiced support for the Arab League's Beirut Declaration of March, 2002, which was a very important declaration on the part of the Arab community in which all Arab states, including Palestine, offered Israel permanent peace and normal diplomatic and economic relations in return for Israel's compliance with international law by returning to its internationally recognized pre-'67 borders. Khaled Meshaal, who is the chief of Hamas' political bureau in Damascus, as well as prime minister Haniyah in Gaza, similarly confirm the organization's willingness to accept ['67] borders and a two-state solution should Israel withdraw from the occupied territories and meet its obligations under international law.

Now, this is something that has been widely written about in the literature. There's a lot of documentation to support this. Now, Hamas has also said that its refusal to end armed resistance, which they feel is armed resistance, including by other Palestinian

factions, without an end to Israeli occupation will remain firm in light of Israel's pursuit of a variety of policies in the absence of negotiations.

Again, Hamas will also argue and has also argued that they are asking to -- they are being asked to recognize Israel when Israel is not being asked to recognize them. They are being asked to renounce violence and to accept Israel when Israel continues to commit violent acts against Palestinians in Gaza, in the West Bank without any kind of censure. So the difference between Hamas and previous Palestinian leaderships is not that they're unwilling to negotiate. They're very willing to negotiate. But they are unwilling to do so on terms that are imposed upon them and that recognition of Israel should not be a precondition for negotiations. It should be the outcome of negotiations.

And, quite frankly, Hamas has said publicly, officially on more than one occasion that, of course, Israel is a state; it exists; it has a right to exist; it is there. This is not the issue. The issue is how do we resolve this conflict. And in the same way that people uphold the right as Israel to maintain its position, its interest, and its principles, so Hamas demands that it be able to do the same thing.

Rabbi Brian Walt: Thank you. I want to go to the question of the boycotts and the humanitarian aid and ask you two questions about that.

Dr. Sara Roy: All right.

Rabbi Brian Walt: There's been some attacks on our fast over the past few days from other people in the Jewish community, right-wing Jews. And the most recent attacks have a theme to them, which is the claim that there is no boycotts, there is no blockade on Gaza, and that the only articles that are being blocked from entering Gaza are munitions.

According to these critics, Israel is allowing all humanitarian aid and, what's more, even luxury items into Gaza. And people also claim that the humanitarian aid that is going to Gaza is being used by the Hamas government for its own purposes and that Hamas doesn't distribute it fairly to the citizens of Gaza. So if you could address the issue of humanitarian aid and of the blockade that's really the center of our initiative here . . .

Dr. Sara Roy: All in one minute, right? [Laughs.]

Rabbi Brian Walt: You can have two.

Dr. Sara Roy: Two, okay; that's better. Well, first of all, I don't know what sources -- or which sources these individuals are consulting. But I can -- I am actually somewhat stunned by that and shocked that anybody who can read would arrive at that conclusion, given the amount of information on Israel's blockade and siege that is now available publicly on the Internet, should people want to access it.

Now, the blockade, the siege of Gaza, is now entering its fourth year. And it's defined by two main features: the absolute denial of various kinds of commodities; and from time to time some of those commodities will be allowed in, in certain quantities, and sometimes they'll be retracted.

But certain things -- there are always a certain number of commodities that are prohibited. And it's also defined by reduced levels of humanitarian aid, in other words, mainly food. It's not that food isn't getting in. Of course, food is getting in. But it is getting in at levels well below required need.

Let's start with food, for example. I have lots of examples and lots of numbers and, of course, don't have the time here to go through them. But, again, some of my data are internal, and they're from -- they all derive from international sources. But a lot of the information is public and can be easily accessed.

Now, according to the World Food Program, for example, the Gaza Strip requires a minimum -- and I wrote about this -- of 400 trucks of food every day, just food, just to meet the basic nutritional needs of the population. In March of this year, the Israeli government -- the Israeli cabinet reached a decision to lift all the restrictions on foodstuff in Gaza. But to my knowledge that has not as yet happened. And I say that based upon the numbers that I get from the various sources I consult.

Now, as I wrote in the piece that you have on your Web site, during the week of May 10, for example, only 653 trucks of food and other supplies -- so that's food and other supplies; so that's not just food -- were allowed in, which, at best, met 23 percent of required [need]. And I say "at best" because some of those trucks were not food. So, actually, the number of food trucks getting in was less than 653. But there's no way to separate it out.

Now, figures for the week of June 14 indicate 843 trucks of food and other goods were allowed into Gaza, meaning that no more than 30 percent of required need was being met. And in the following week, June 21, only 474 trucks of food and other supplies were allowed entry, which, at best, met 17 percent of required [need].

And the journalist Amira Hass, who is a close friend of mine, wrote in Ha'aretz in May that Israel allows only 30 to 40 commercial items to enter Gaza, compared to 4,000 approved products that were allowed in prior to June of 2006. And she gives a long list. And I replicated that in my opinion piece that's on your Web site.

Now, of course, the question of the blockade and what is getting into Gaza and what is not, while it is certainly important, again, is one illustration of the much larger and more critical issue and that is the destruction of Gaza's economy and the weakening of its society, which is something that has been ongoing for many, many years.

And the situation of Gaza economically was severely compromised long before the December war against it and, of course, as a result of that very terrible assault has become far worse. Gaza, together with the West Bank, at one point was considered a lower-middle income economy. Ninety percent of activity in Gaza today, according to local economists there -- and many of them [are] people I know quite well. Ninety percent of activity in this once lower-middle income economy is now devoted to smuggling. The agricultural sector has for all intents and purposes been seriously diminished, 80 percent of crops destroyed; thousands of dunams, of orchards, with mature fruit trees destroyed; hundreds of agricultural wells destroyed.

You have the problem of sewage overflow and sewage seeping into the water table, which, of course, presents hazards not only to people, but to economic activity as well. And there are many, many other problems that Gaza is burdened with. So while it is absolutely important for all of us to remain vigilant about the siege and to lobby very hard -- as hard as we can -- to lift the siege, to press the Israeli government to lift this terrible siege and blockage so that people can receive humanitarian supplies in the quantities in which they are needed, as well as a variety of other commodities so they can start rebuilding their society, which they as yet are unable to do. And, as Mona very clearly described, it is also important not to treat the siege, as I said earlier, as a discreet event. It is the one illustration and, of course, the logical, in a tragic sense, extension of an ongoing policy of attack and dismemberment and disruption

levied on Gaza for many, many years. Now, does Israel -- what was the second question? Does Israel --

Rabbi Brian Walt: The question is about Hamas and its distribution of aid, that the argument is --

Dr. Sara Roy: Oh, yes.

Rabbi Brian Walt: -- that the only concern that Israel has with the blockade is, of course, about munitions. It doesn't stop things that aren't going to be used for munitions and that, anyway, when the aid gets there, the Hamas government doesn't distribute the aid to the people of Gaza.

Dr. Sara Roy: Oh, yes. Okay.

Rabbi Brian Walt: It's not a government that cares about its people.

Dr. Sara Roy: Yes, okay. I would urge your readers -- [laughs] your callers to read a recent report put out by the international crisis group called Unfinished Business in Gaza. And they basically say and affirm what other people have told me who work in the development community there that, first of all, Hamas claims to -- and many people feel this is accurate -- have distributed roughly \$65 million to people in the Gaza Strip, people who have lost their jobs, who have just -- whose homes have been destroyed, to families whose members -- brothers, sisters, parents, whatever -- were killed during the war, and also to municipalities.

Now, there has been, absolutely, a kind of tug of war or internal conflict, tensions -- whatever word you want to use -- between Hamas and [ANERA] in particular and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and some aid groups over who will be allowed to distribute aid and how much aid will be allowed in. Now, it's important to understand though that much of the tension that emerged between Hamas and aid distributors derived from the need of the government, of the Hamas government, to establish its control and legitimacy as the authority in Gaza and not to control aid in order to distribute it to Hamas supporters and cronies.

Now, of course, there is a certain degree of favoritism that -- there are examples of favoritism that, of course, have occurred. But the ICG report, as well as other reports I've read, indicate that although one can find some examples of this kind of favoritism, overall aid has been distributed very well, regardless of party affiliation. You know, Brian, there [a] few situations where the need to respect humanitarian space and neutrality is more acute and probably few where the politicization of aid is so intense.

And, again, I think this gets back to the question about the overall blockade because this issue, in terms of whether Hamas is distributing aid fairly or not, while it's important certainly, is minor in my view compared to the overall restrictions placed on that aid by the Israeli government, by the U.S., by the European Union.

And the whole issue of -- you mentioned, I think, munitions coming in. Well, first of all, no one disputes Israel's right to self-defense, nor should we dispute the Palestinian's right to self-defense either. For me, the far more relevant question in all of this is whether Israel is willing to engage or to [pursue] diplomacy, to engage in a diplomatic process of negotiations as a way to address and resolve this crisis as opposed to the consistent use of force. To me, that is the far more relevant question.

Rabbi Brian Walt: Thank you. I want to just assure our listeners, I have my eye on the clock. And we're trying to end this at 3:15. And it will definitely end no later than 3:25. But I do want to pursue, if you're willing, Sara, one or two more questions that I think would be very important for our initiative and to our understanding of what we're doing.

Dr. Sara Roy: Certainly.

Rabbi Brian Walt: This is related to what you just said, Sara. And that is in trying to get Israel to engage, as you say, in a political process that's towards reconciliation, towards a negotiated settlement, and that in some way your claim that Israel set it up -- the demand for recognition and so on -- as deliberately to thwart those negotiations . . . So to what extent do you believe that President Obama's initiative is already having any positive effect on the humanitarian situation in Gaza?

There are reports that as a result of pressure from the administration Israel is lifting some of the severity of the denial of goods to enter Gaza. And, in general, what is the relationship between the peace process, as it were, and Obama's efforts to revive that peace process and the resolution of the Gaza crisis? And because we're out of time, I'm going to ask you to also address [laughter] the people who have written in while you've been on the phone.

One person wrote in -- the question is we're -- our goals of our fast are not about, although we encourage people to give humanitarian aid for sure, and it's important; and it was really important to start with that . . . The bottom line this is not just about humanitarian aid. Our four goals have goals that precisely go to the idea of negotiation and lifting --

Dr. Sara Roy: Absolutely.

Rabbi Brian Walt: But what could we do both . . . Do you think the present initiative by Obama, by the Obama administration, is having an effect? And what can we do as members of this initiative to try to spur the move towards a serious political engagement?

Dr. Sara Roy: Okay. First of all, you use the term "peace process." And I would like to [laughs] emphasize that what is happening between Israel and the Palestinians today contradicts, in my view, any notion of peace, let alone a process or a meaningful attempt to achieve it. So I always am very sensitive to the use of words and terms. And I think

that this is one, of course, that has been thrown about a great deal and is used over and over.

But we need to step back and say to ourselves, what do we really mean by this, and is it actually relevant anymore. My view? . . . It is not. We need to -- the peace process ended a long time ago. And one can argue over when it ended if it -- and some people argue it never actually really began. But I think it is incorrect, almost illegitimate in a way, to use that term under the present circumstances.

Now, having said that, President Obama's pressure -- and, again, I'm not saying it doesn't have a certain degree of importance. But it seems to me that it is largely symbolic. And whether it translates into anything meaningful remains to be seen. It is true that as a result of some of his statements that the Israeli authorities have allowed in some additional items of food commodities into Gaza, although it's not clear to me, and I don't have the information on this.

But it's not clear to me to what degree that is. I mean, they may have included more food items; but, again, to what level and in what quantity? I personally remain rather skeptical. I certainly hope to be proven wrong. But I think allowing a few more items into Gaza because the U.S. president has expressed displeasure with the Israeli blockade will in the end do nothing to address the critical economic and social issues facing Gaza and the West Bank.

What is really needed from our government is a serious reappraisal of our policies, which is a daunting task for any administration. But it needs to begin somewhere. And, obviously, some hard questions have to be asked. And, again -- and it's not in an attempt to punish Israel per se; it's an attempt to resolve this conflict on terms that are more equitable and have the -- caught the hope of [phone rings] -- hold on; I'm sorry -- have the hope of being sustainable over time.

Throwing palliatives at Palestinians, throwing gestures or a few more lessened restrictions at them here and there, which is what happened throughout the Oslo process is unacceptable. And it's not going to do anything. People have -- Palestinians have learned from the last 15, almost 16, years of a very moribund and very damaging peace process, what that did, what it was, how it was implemented.

And it's impossible to engage in the same tactics and policies again, because they simply won't work. And they won't work because they're fundamentally unjust, unfair, and do virtually nothing to address the fundamental needs and rights of this population. So what is really needed is a much more serious re-thinking of our policy approach. And, while I believe that President Obama as a person, as a human being, is committed to a more just solution, the question remains whether he will be able to actually implement that.

Now, what can we as a community do? Well, I think just what we're -- just what is being done with this fast in part, and that is to bring

attention to this issue, educate others, both within our community and outside of it by providing them with a different way of understanding the conflict from the one that we've been given and protest, absolutely protest, to our political representatives.

I think this initiative on the part of the rabbinical community -- the fact that this was started by rabbis and is supported by certain members of the rabbinical community in the United States is enormously important. I cannot reiterate enough the importance of a principled, Jewish voice that is represented here. It is essential not only for Palestinians to understand that there are many Jews, and certainly a growing number of Jews, who do not support Israeli policies in Gaza and the West Bank, who oppose the occupation, who want to see a just solution or a more just solution, who want to see Palestinians living in their own state in peace and security along with Israelis.

And it's important for those Israelis who, inside Israel, have struggled for so long to end the occupation and, of course, that it's very important for us as a community, because, for me, it's not only a form of healing and repair; it's a form of empowerment. And I think that there are many, many Jews in this country who are seeking a way to ethically and morally voice their protest and to become part of a community of Jews, with conscience, with care, and with concern, [who] try to address this issue in a manner that will lead hopefully to some peace with which both peoples can live.

And so I think we should just do more of what we're doing. And I think when people ask me this question when I lecture, I say, "Education is absolutely critical, educating others, educating, as I said, people inside and outside our community." And, also, I absolutely believe very strongly in protesting to your political representative. It makes -- it has an impact.

Rabbi Brian Walt: I want to thank you so much for everything you do on this issue, for your voice, for your clarity. Clearly, you've given a very coherent and provocative and important presentation of the conflict, a different way of conceiving it and of framing it. And it's not the normal one that we hear. So I think your call for us to educate is to educate ourselves as well, to begin with ourselves.

As people on this call who are fasting today, I imagine we're all committing to pray, to learn, and to act on this. I want to say that I got some notes during the call, one before the call from a faster. I just want to mention [Sandy McMillan] who said, "I've joined Fast for Gaza, and I'm fasting today. On each fast day, I will be sending an email to President Obama inviting him to join us and to call for an end to the blockade of Gaza." And she asked, would it be useful for us all to do the same.

Dr. Sara Roy: Marvelous.

Rabbi Brian Walt: It will be useful for us to do that and more and many other ideas that are going to emerge over the coming weeks and as this

campaign grows. I want to end by thanking Mona and Dr. Roy -- Mona abu Ramadan and Dr. Roy for being on the call. I want to thank everyone who is on the call. I will ask you just to stay for a few minutes.

I also got a note during the call from [Michael Lerner] who actually ran an ad during the time of the assault on Gaza calling for an immediate ceasefire. And that was signed by many rabbis. And I don't want to in any way denigrate all the efforts that many groups are doing. Our effort is an ad hoc group.

We will work with many, many groups and honor the work done by Tikkun, by The Shalom Center, by Brit Tzedek, by Jewish Voice for Peace, by all kinds of organizations that are helping. Our focus, our singular focus, is on lifting the blockade and of spurring and encouraging a real political negotiation without preconditions.

And I urge people to look at our four goals, which are -- we already had written, you will be interested to know, under number two to say provide humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. And it was Dr. Roy who corrected us. And we added to provide humanitarian and developmental aid to the people of Gaza to call for a lifting of the blockade, to call for negotiations without preconditions, and to encourage our government -- the American government -- to engage both Israelis and Palestinians towards a just and a peaceful settlement of this conflict.

As Rabbi Rosen mentioned at the beginning, we hope that this will grow. And it will only grow by the efforts of all of you on this call to recruit others. If [your rabbi is] on this call, it would help us immensely to grow the number of rabbis on the call. You well know the kinds of attacks that rabbis are under and that rabbis will be under.

Already we have attacks that have come on us mostly directed from Israel, but some in the United States. I hear from rabbis who've signed this of pressure in their communities. And we will be stronger if there are more rabbis signed up and are part of the minyan. As I said in the beginning, if we stand together, our voice will be that much more effective.

And to people of other faiths who are on here, we want to say we really urge you to also organize and do outreach and invite clergy of other faiths. I think in the beginning Rabbi Rosen mentioned some 30 Christians, I think he said, and he meant Christian clergy that are part of our list of growing Christian clergy that are on here; and we have a list of Muslim clergy and leaders that are on our list. So to recruit people --

The second thing is we really do want to do more public events for our second [task]. That will be on -- I believe it's August -- can someone tell me the date? --

Male Voice:

The 21st.

Rabbi Brian Walt: -- the 21st of August, the third Thursday in August. And I want to urge people to write to me or to Brant or to Rabbi Greenfield, who has taken on the task of organizing and wrote the ritual that we are suggesting that people use. And then people have all kinds of ideas for signs and buttons and all kinds of ways of engaging people in this issue.

We will try to put the information and especially the one report that Dr. Roy mentioned on our Web site. And you should check our Web site often, because our Web site is going to be the primary way in which we communicate. And we will also if people want -- I assume that today's call -- for me, it evokes a lot of questions, important questions.

I am so grateful for the way that Dr. Roy has framed it and for the perspective of the humanitarian and human need that Mona abu Ramadan mentioned right at the beginning. And I really would love to have a discussion about that.

But we're not going to do that on the main list serve, which will just be used once or twice maximum, twice a week for announcements to everyone. But if people want there to be a discussion list serve, we will set one up. But we need to have those request for it. And then people can sign up as [individual].

So I want to wish everyone who is fasting today -- and I want to say, as well, a word about fasting. We're not -- this is drawing on an ancient tradition of fasting in times of emergency and moral crisis. I know I am fasting for sunrise to sunset. I imagine there are many people on here who are. I imagine there are some people who are doing some modified version of that, which is their meaningful way of fasting. And I imagine there are many people for whom fasting is either impossible or not meaningful.

And we invite you as well, those who don't see fasting as a meaningful act, to join us, but to engage, to take this day as a day of engagement in this issue and to make a commitment to take actions on this day. I made a -- I wrote a piece with 10 suggestions for a fast day. That's also on our Web site. You can go and look at it there.

And, lastly, I want to say even though our focus should not be on charity as such but humanitarian suffering. And suffering needs to be alleviated and needs to be addressed. So I would encourage you, if you're so moved today. And in Jewish tradition, tzedaka, broadly defined both as an act of alleviating suffering and, according to its prime roots about justice, to change the structures of oppression that lead to that suffering that we commit ourselves to both acts of tzedaka today.

So thank you to everyone who is on the call. We appreciate any feedback and offers that you have. I ask you to be patient. We are

running this as an initiative that's now grown into a large body of people, which is gratifying. And we'll be going back to the drawing board and trying to think about how we carry this forward in the most effective way.

So thank you to everyone, and may this fast day inspire us and those we love to learn more, to be -- open our hearts to the suffering of all people and especially people who are often demonized and out of our hearts, to open our hearts to those people and to see the image of God in all people. May this fast bring blessing to people who are suffering in our universe. And we say amen. Thanks to everyone.

Dr. Sara Roy: Thank you.

Mona abu Ramadan: Thank you.

[End of recorded material]