



Annette Groth

Member of the German Bundestag
Spokeswoman on human rights
for the Left Party parliamentary group

Annette Groth, MdB
Spokeswoman on human rights
for the Left Party parliamentary group

Platz der Republik 1
11011 Berlin

Telefon: +49 30 227-77207
Fax: +49 30 227-76207
E-Mail: annette.groth@bundestag.de

25th September 2013

Open Letter to the Israeli and Egyptian Governments: The ongoing and intensified blockade of the Gaza Strip needs to be removed!

Raji Sourani is a prominent human rights lawyer from the Gaza Strip. He is the 1991 recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award and was an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience. He is member of the International Commission of Jurists, Vice President of the International Federation of Human Rights and founder and director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. Mr. Sourani was invited to deliver lectures on the Oslo accords and the situation of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in several European cities. All those lectures had to be cancelled, because Mr. Sourani was not able to leave the Gaza Strip due to its closure by the Israeli and Egyptian military.

The blockade of the Gaza Strip was imposed by the Israeli and the Egyptian governments in the summer of 2007. The Israeli government claims to have eased the blockade for non-military goods in June 2010, but in fact the living-conditions of the people of Gaza stayed as harsh as before, as the United Nations confirmed at several occasions. For example, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) concluded in February 2011, that there is no significant improvement in people's livelihoods following the alleged ease of the blockade.

In May 2011, Egypt opened its Rafah Border crossing with the Gaza Strip, although severe restrictions on the movement of personnel and goods in and out of Gaza stayed in place. The greatest deal of goods continued to be smuggled into Gaza through tunnels. After the Egyptian military-backed interim government took control some months ago, it started shutting down the tunnels and largely closed the Rafah crossing point. Since then Gaza is completely shut off from the world.

Before the Egyptian military ousted former president Mursi, Rafah was Gaza's only connection to the outside world with an estimated 1.200 people crossing each day. Nowadays, not more than 250 people are permitted to cross, if the Rafah crossing is opened at all. 10.000 Palestinians are



on the waiting list. Gaza is the world's biggest prison, even people in need of medical care due to the shortages inside the Gaza Strip are not admitted into Egypt anymore. The volume of goods and supplies which enter Gaza through the Israeli crossing point is far below the needs of the population. Nowadays, only 179 trucks are permitted to cross each day, compared to almost 600 trucks before the siege was imposed by the Israeli government in 2007. With the destruction of an estimated 90% of the tunnels by the Egyptian army, living-conditions in Gaza are becoming harsher day by day. Electricity is in danger to be shut down and no one knows if the 14 hospitals and 60 health centres in the Gaza Strip will be able to continue to function.

I urge the Egyptian and the Israeli governments to open the crossing points for personnel and goods. I urge the Egyptian authorities to refrain from enforcing the Israeli-implemented blockade of Gaza. The Rafah crossing should be opened in both directions to let the population of Gaza pass and to enable commercial traffic, especially with drugs and medical equipment, fuel and food supplies. Not just Raji Sourani, but all the population of the Gaza Strip, should be permitted to cross the borders. The blockade, which violates international law and disregards human rights on a large scale, needs to be removed immediately.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Annette Groth'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'A'.

Annette Groth