

Carter says Gaza residents are treated like animals: Two-year-old blockade "an atrocity"

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Former president Jimmy Carter is calling Israel's two-year-old blockade of Gaza an "atrocity" and saying that people there are being treated like animals. "Tragically, the international community largely ignores the cries for help, while the citizens of Gaza are being treated more like animals than human beings," said Carter in a June 16 speech.

Carter's remarks came during visits to Syria, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza following monitoring of Lebanese elections June 7 by observers from the Atlanta-based Carter Center.

At Cairo University, Carter said that Palestinians in Gaza are being "starved to death" and that they receive fewer calories daily than people in the poorest parts of Africa.

"It's an atrocity what is being perpetrated as punishment on the people in Gaza," said Carter, as quoted in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. "It's a crime. . . . I think it is an abomination that this continues to go on."

Israel imposed a blockade two years ago when Hamas, an Islamist party that supports attacks on Israel, won elections in Gaza and thus gained control of the government there. Fatah, the more moderate of the two main Palestinian parties, retained control of the West Bank territories.

Israel says that its aim is to weaken Hamas, but critics say that the blockade punishes Gaza's civilians and increases their anger toward Israel.

United Nations officials have reported that months after fierce fighting between Hamas and Israel ended in January, Israeli officials are still allowing only basic necessities like food and medicine into Gaza.

“Never before in history has a large community been savaged by bombs and missiles and then deprived of the means to repair itself,” said Carter, a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Carter is convener of a movement called the New Baptist Covenant, launched in 2008 to unify Baptists in North America around common concerns like justice for the poor. In May, Carter invited religious leaders to a two-day summit at the Carter Center to discuss a “growing sense of despair” in the Holy Land.

Strong supporters of Israel—including many U.S. conservatives—have been highly critical of Carter. He came under intense criticism from many Israel backers for his 2007 book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, in which he compares Israel’s treatment of Palestinians living within its borders to the system by which South Africa subjugated its nonwhite majority until the early 1990s.

Under pressure from the U.S., Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on June 14 that he supports the creation of a Palestinian state. But Netanyahu insisted that the state be demilitarized, that Jerusalem remain the undivided capital of Israel and that Palestinians recognize Israel “as the nation of the Jewish people.” - *Associated Baptist Press*