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## 10 attorneys general defend Israel

May 6, 2009

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Attorneys general from 10 states defended Israel's military action in the Gaza Strip, in a letter sent to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The letter, sent last month, also condemned Hamas for what it called "war crimes" for its bomb attacks on civilian targets in southern Israel.

The attorneys general wrote that "By intentionally targeting 6,300 rockets against Israel's civilian population, Hamas is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of a war crime in that it has violated ... the Geneva Convention of 1949." The letter notes that the Geneva Convention provides that parties in a conflict must distinguish between civilians and combatants, and civilian and military objectives, and "direct their operations only against military objectives."

"In addition to its war crimes committed against the Israeli civilian population, Hamas has also committed atrocities against the Palestinian civilian population under its control in Gaza by using these civilians as shields for its criminal conduct," the letter continued.

The officials concluded that "Hamas' continuous rocket and mortar attacks on Israel's civilian population are a *casus bellum*. As in all wars, the appropriate response is not a 'proportionate one,' but one measured to bring about an end to the acts of war."

The America-Israel Friendship League said in a statement that it welcomed the letter by the attorneys general, calling it "a strong rejoinder to those who have castigated Israel over its role in Gaza and used it in an attempt to delegitimize the Jewish State."

Several of the attorneys general have visited Israel through an educational exchange program conducted by the league, which offers American officials the chance to become familiar with Israel's legal framework, security issues and commitment to the rule of law.

The 10 attorneys general represent the states of Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio, Rhode Island, Utah and Washington.

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