**Australia Lists Hamas As Terrorist Organisation**

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CANBERRA, Australia - The Australian government has formally listed Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

The move comes in the middle of a war in Gaza as the Palestinian death toll in the Israeli-Hamas conflict surpasses 1,000, with several thousand more wounded. The Israeli death toll of 45, largely consists of soldiers who account for 43 of the deaths.

Until last week it was only the military wing of Hamas, Izz alDin al Qassam Brigades, that Australia designated as a terrorist organisation, quarantining the parent which is largely involved in the provision of humanitarian services such as setting up and operating hospitals, medical clinics and schools.

The last so-called terrorist attack carried out by the al-Qassam Brigades occurred on 7 April 2011. The Australian National Security agency says an anti-tank missile struck a school bus near the Gaza strip, destroying the bus and resulting in the death of an Israeli teenager. The Brigades took responsibility for the attack, but, according to the ANC, the group they had not intended to target Israeli schoolchildren, and had mistaken the bus for one carrying Israeli military personnel.

Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who announced the listing of Hamas as a terrorist organisation has criticised the group for not accepting last week's ceasefire, and has praised Israel for its leadership.

"The Australian Government has listed Hamas as a terrorist organisation pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1373, which deals with the prevention and suppression of terrorist acts," Bishop said in a statement.

"Hamas claims to represent Gaza, yet it has jeopardised the welfare of its own people by rejecting the proposal for a ceasefire," she added.

"The Israeli Government demonstrated leadership by accepting the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire proposal.," the Australian foreign minister added, referring to the ceasefire proposed last week which was accepted by Israel, but rejected by Hamas - although Hamas claimed it had not been notified of the proposed truce.

The listing of Hamas as a terrorist organisation follows another measure adopted by the ten-months old Australian government which has caused controversy. Last month Australian Attorney-General George Brandis announced Australia would no longer refer to East Jerusalem as "occupied."

"The description of East Jerusalem as Occupied East Jerusalem is a term freighted with pejorative implications, which is neither appropriate nor useful," he said in a statement.

"It should not, and will not, be the practice of the Australian Government to describe areas of negotiation in such judgmental language," he said.

The announcement drew criticism prompting Bishop to try and hose down the comments. This followed another controversy in January this year when Bishop questioned whether Israeli settlements were illegal. "I would like to see which international law has declared Israeli settlements illegal," she said. When asked to clarify her comments, the Australian foreign minister said, "I don't think it's helpful to prejudge the settlement issue if you're going to get a negotiated solution."

Australia is now the only country, outside Israel, to say publicly that settlements are not illegal.

The Australian government's stance differs somewhat from previous Australian governments. Andrew Downer who held the foreign ministry post in John Howard's government when Hamas won elections in the Palestinian territories in 2006 then hailed the transition of Hamas into the political echelon.

"The recent Palestinian Parliamentary elections were major milestones on the road to true democracy in that they were free and fair, reflected the will of the people, the results were accepted by the participants and led to a transfer of power," he said at the time.

"While there is a debate underway on both the applicability and appropriate pace of implementation of democracy in the Middle East, I remain of the view that democracy will ultimately be a very positive influence. But it is clear that there will be some major bumps on the way, as the Palestinians find their way along the democratic road."

"I don't know too many people who were not taken aback by the strong showing of Hamas in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections," the former Australian foreign minister said. "The result surprised even Hamas itself, which is clearly ill-prepared for the rigours of government."

"There is a strong case to be made that the election was not in fact a vote for extremism, but reflected Palestinian frustration with the incompetence and corruption within the Palestinian Authority - its failure to deliver services and improve the daily lives of Palestinians."

"Now that it has the responsibilities of government, the message to Hamas from the international community, including Australia, is quite clear: renounce violence, formally recognise Israel, and recognise the agreements previously entered into by the Palestinian leadership," Downer said.

Australia's then-enthusiasm for Hamas however was not felt elsewhere. As history showed Israel and the United States, which had encouraged the Hamas involvement in the elections, reacted angrily and accused the Palestinians of making a grave error. Israel imposed sanctions while the United States cooled on its aid and support to the territories. Fatah, which had been invited into the Hamas government withdrew its support leaving Hamas isolated. A short time later Israel imposed a blockade which has remained in force since.

Downer would however have been pleased at last month's announcement by Hamas and Fatah that they were forming a unity government. The pair signed a a pact that accepted the principles of nonviolence, recognised Israel, and accepted adherence to past agreements.

Israel however was not impressed and pounced, slamming Fatah for bringing a terrorist organisation into the government, denouncing the Palestinian Authority and announcing it would no longer negotiate with Mahmoud Abbas.

On 12 June when 3 Israeli teenagers disappeared, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately blamed Hamas, describing them as a murderous terrorist organisation. He later compared them to ISIS and al-Qaeda. Netanyahu launched raids in the West Bank arresting several hundred people, mostly members of Hamas. Several Palestinians were killed. As the rampage continued, Hamas, which had maintained a ceasefire since November 2012 began responding to the attacks by firing rockets, two, three, four rockets a day through the latter parts of June.

When the bodies of the murdered teenagers were discovered on 30 June Netanyahu ordered an escalation of air bombardments of the Gaza Strip. This brought more rockets. And so Operation Brother's Keeper which originated on 12 June, was replaced by Operation Protective Edge which has been largely promoted as a defensive operation, but which has undoubtedly been an offensive operation.

The numbers tell the story. As of Saturday more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed, and several thousand wounded. Forty five Israelis have been killed, 43 of them soldiers. Israel maintains it has conducted pin-prick, surgical operations, designed to avoid civilian deaths. They say Hamas on the other hand are deliberately targeting civilians. UN officials however say 70% to 80% of the Palestinians killed have been civilians, while only 7% the Israeli deaths have involved civilians.

Of the total death toll of around 1,043, 96% have been Palestinian and 4% israeli. The total number of Israelis killed by the rockets, which only escalated after three weeks of provocation, is three.

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| Despite the hostilities the warring parties downed their arms on Saturday morning for a 12-hour ceasefire, which was extended by four hours, and then for another 24 hours. It was during this time the Palestinian death toll was catapulted by the discovery of some 170 bodies pulled from the rubble of destroyed homes. |