

Statement of concern over the escalation of the Gaza crisis, calling for an immediate ceasefire, observance of international law, and an end to the occupation

One year after its outbreak, the crisis in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, shows no signs of abating, and the situation is now catastrophic. As a result of Israel's full-scale invasion and indiscriminate attacks targeting the entire population, more than 40,000 people (70% of which are children and women) have been killed. Hospitals and schools have been attacked, and life is becoming impossible in Gaza. Universities and cultural facilities were destroyed, researchers and educators were killed, and valuable monuments of historical and cultural heritage that convey the region's memory were lost. Furthermore, as a result of the virtual neglect of this situation by the international community, the war is now spreading to Lebanon as well.

As historians of a country with a constitution that rejects the use of force as a means of settling international disputes, renounces war, and upholds the right of all peoples of the world to live in peace, we cannot overlook this situation. Indiscriminate attacks and collective punishment are clear violations of international law and international humanitarian law and must never be tolerated. It is observed that, in Europe and the U.S., the mere act of criticizing the invasion of Gaza tends to be regarded as "anti-Semitic," arguments and movements opposed to the war are suppressed, and thus intellectuals and academics (historians included) are often compelled to speak with reserve. It is wrong, however, to equate the Israeli government with the Jewish people, as demonstrated by the fact that, among Jewish citizens themselves in the U.S. and elsewhere, there are those who protest against the invasion, declaring, "This is not our war." For the same reason, we warn against the rise of anti-Semitism that takes advantage of the situation in Gaza, and explicitly denounce it.

Gaza and the West Bank are the areas that have been occupied by Israel for decades in violation of international law. At the root of the current crisis, hence, lies the question of occupation and, further back, that of the historical background of the state of Israel, which was established in the process of Western colonization of the Middle East and has been expanding its territories through successive wars. In July 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion criticizing Israel's occupation since 1967 and calling for its end. Consequently, in September 2024, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution demanding that the occupation should be ended within one year.

In retrospect, invasion, occupation, and colonialism are precisely the same path trodden by

Japan in the past. As historians who are fully aware of our own past of invasion and colonization of Asian countries and have been striving, from a historical perspective, to contribute to the building of a peaceful world, we express our concern about the situation in Gaza and strongly call for an immediate ceasefire, observance of international law and international humanitarian law, and an end to the occupation. We sincerely hope that, by solving the question through non-military means and by realizing the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, peace will be achieved in the Middle East, the social fabric of the region, which was historically characterized by the coexistence of diverse religions and cultures, will be restored, and the entire world will, thereby, be saved from the danger of a catastrophic war.

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