

Interview in the ZDF Morning Magazine with Knut Dethlefsen, resident representative of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung office in East-Jerusalem, on the current situation in Gaza. Monday, December 29, 2008

ZDF Morning Magazine (MoMa): I now greet Knut Dethlefsen in Jerusalem, the head of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung there. Good morning, Mr. Dethlefsen.

Knut Dethlefsen: Good morning, Mrs. Heide.

MoMa: What are you hearing in Jerusalem about the military offensive?

Dethlefsen: Well, here in Jerusalem we are of course in the eye of the storm. And there, as is known, things are calm. But the calm is misleading. Things are very tense. In the Palestinian parts of Jerusalem, there is a massive police presence and overall we are experiencing something which could turn into wildfire throughout the entire region.

MoMa: Israel has called up reservists – at least, this is what we are reading in our papers. So will they invade with ground troupes? What do you think?

Dethlefsen: I consider that to be very likely. I am in contact with my colleague in the Gaza Strip on an almost hourly basis, and half an hour ago I also spoke to my colleague there, Dr. Usama Antar. The Israelis are massing troupes at the north of the Gaza Strip, and people there are expecting an invasion in the next three days. This may also only be a limited incursion, in order to attack Hamas or other positions.

MoMa: Well, this is already the third day of the heaviest air attacks since the Six Day War in 1967. How much longer will the Israeli army's operation last?

Dethlefsen: That's hard to say. What we can say is that we are here seeing a massive escalation in violence. There have never been so many fatalities in the Gaza Strip in such a short time. Naturally Israel has the right of self-defense, but here of course use is being made of disproportionately strong military means. The Gaza Strip is very densely populated. And the people, the civilian population, is suffering greatly under these attacks.

MoMa: The Middle East Quartet has already intervened. Who else might mediate in the conflict? Perhaps the EU?

Dethlefsen: Yes, I think that would be very important. The most important thing, if we now think of the humanitarian consequences of this crisis, or this war, is for the hostilities to be stopped as quickly as possible. I think that this is possible if intervention by the Middle East Quartet and the EU, for example by Tony Blair [the special envoy of the Middle East Quartet] were to come about now. The main thing is for the hostilities to cease and the borders to be opened for humanitarian supplies, particularly for medicine, because the hospitals in the Gaza Strip just can't cope with the large numbers of the wounded.

MoMa: So intervention, as you've just said. On a short-term basis, what can be done now in order to bring things under control?

Dethlefsen: I think it particularly important to talk to Israel, about the present military escalation naturally not meaning a solution to the crisis. It won't lead to a military victory over Hamas, nor will it be possible to defeat them politically. Nor is it a solution for the Gaza Strip. We have a population of a million and a half there, who have been practically locked down for the last year and a half, and they had already been suffering greatly. In very tangible terms, that means stopping the hostilities now, and then talks to re-establish the ceasefire which existed for six months. When all's said and done, both Israel and Hamas also helped to break this ceasefire. And now it's important that the ceasefire be re-established, and we must say this should happen in the next few hours. This can only happen as a result of talks, not rockets.

MoMa: Many thanks, Knut Dethlefsen, in Jerusalem.