

Israeli ADL objects to rabbis' letter on military force: Expresses concern over all civilian deaths

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The Israel office of the Anti-Defamation League has taken issue with a letter from rabbis calling on the Israeli army to increase military force against the Palestinians even when this force could endanger innocent Palestinian civilians.

"The citizens of Israel have for too long experienced cruel terrorist atrocities and daily threats that indeed must be dealt with forcefully," said the ADL in a prepared statement. "However, we mourn along with the majority of Israelis the injury and loss of any and all innocent civilians during the course of battle, regardless of national identity or religion.

"As in the past when similar statements were made by some rabbis and religious leaders, we remind ourselves and take pride in the fact that the IDF [Israel Defense Force] takes great pains to minimize civilian loss of life, often at its own peril and many times with tragic results."

An editorial in the left-wing newspaper *Ha'aretz* also condemned the rabbis' letter, made public in early September. "Murder and terror cannot be justified, and the Palestinians have missed more than a few opportunities to exploit periods of negotiations for political gain," the newspaper said. "Nevertheless, the complete disregard of the broader aspects of the conflict makes the rabbis' declaration both hollow and fanatic."

Prominent rabbis wield a great deal of influence in right-wing circles. Israeli society is severely divided over how to combat terrorism, which has claimed almost 1,000 Israeli lives since the start of the Palestinian uprising four years ago.

The letter was sent to Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz by rabbinic heads of West Bank seminaries and members of the Rabbinical Council of the Yesha Council of Jewish settlements. It declared that "there is no war in the world in which it is possible to

delineate entirely between the [civilian] population and the [enemy] army.” The rabbis said they based their opinion on Talmudic sources stating that it is permissible to take another life in self-defense. -*Religion News Service*