

Reginans call for peace in Gaza

By Veronica Rhodes, Regina Leader-Post
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REGINA -- More than 130 people gathered in the bone-chilling cold in Regina on Saturday to call for peace in a region engaged in a deadly conflict half a world away.

Braving the -45 wind chill, the bundled-up crowd -- which included several children -- gathered in Victoria Park for a rally calling for an end to the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip. Several people carried signs with messages such as "Stop the assault on Gaza," "Are we not human?" and "Save the children of Gaza."

Fathi Hamad, president of Muslims for Peace and Justice, which organized the rally, said the event was not meant to choose sides in the conflict but rather to call for a peaceful end to it.

"All we wish to say is let us find a solution using civilized and legal, lawful means rather than whoever has the biggest gun wins," said Hamad prior to the rally.

"All we are asking for is an end of violence ... Shedding more blood will not solve the problem. It hasn't solved it over the last 60 years."

Since Dec. 27, Israel began a military offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip that has resulted in the deaths of at least 446 Palestinians and left more than 2,000 wounded. Four Israelis have also been killed by Hamas rocket attacks.

On Saturday, Israeli troops backed by helicopters advanced into Gaza in the first ground action of the military offensive, during which the Palestinian enclave has been pounded by Israeli firepower from land, sea and air. Israeli officials had repeatedly warned they would step up military action if Hamas rocket attacks on southern Israel did not stop but Hamas continued the action.

Thousands of people in cities around the world, including London, Paris, Dublin and Amsterdam, took part in protests on Saturday to demand a halt to the bombing of Gaza. In Canada, similar rallies were held in Windsor, Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

Jean Parker came out to the rally in Regina out of concern for the conflict in the Middle East, for which she wants to see both sides come together and find a peaceful resolution.

While she didn't know if the rally in Regina could make a difference, she was willing to try.

"It's a mindset. If I'm thinking this way and sending out good vibes, then I hope that makes a difference. I think there will be people all over the world who are coming together for peace. I would like to join them," said Parker.

Hamad was born in 1948 in Egypt, which shares a border with Gaza, and moved to Canada in the 1970s. He said rallying for peace in the region, as in any area in the world, is an issue of humanity.

"It is not because it is my neighbouring country or people that look like me or people that have a religion similar to mine," he explained.

"I will do the same for anybody, whether they are an atheist, a different religion, different race. We are on the same planet together."

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