

Declaration by South Africans on Apartheid Israel

The Palestinian rebellion has been a long time coming. Over three decades of occupation is but one dimension of their tragedy. Driven from their original homes, villages and land by sustained atrocities, condemned to miserable camps, dispersed in a far-flung Diaspora, subjected to massacres like the Sabra and Shatila slaughter of over 3000 refugees, and unending persecution.

The suffering in the West Bank and Gaza is the continuation of the colonisation of all of Palestine. Zionist militias seized 75% of the land and drove out 750 000 Palestinians through a series of massacres between the partition of Palestine in 1947 and the formation of Israel. With the declaration of the state of Israel, 531 Palestinian cities, towns and villages were razed to the ground, disappearing from the map. Those remaining were denuded of land, confiscated without compensation.

We acknowledge the theft of the land and realise how today the Jewish National Fund, a member of the World Zionist Organisation, administers 93% of the land of Israel. To live on land, lease it, sharecrop or work on it, one must establish four generations of maternal Jewish descent. In Israel, such a lineage is necessary in order to enjoy elementary rights. We cannot mistake the quintessentially racist character of such a state. Israel is an apartheid state, founded on pillage and predicated on exclusivity. Rights flow from ethnic and religious identity.

We, South Africans who have lived through apartheid cannot be silent as another entire people are treated as non-human beings; people without rights or human dignity

and facing daily humiliation. We cannot permit a ruthless state to use military jets, helicopter gun-ships and tanks on civilians. We cannot accept state assassinations of activists, the torture of political prisoners, the murder of children and collective punishment.

We, South Africans who lived for decades under rulers with a colonial mentality see Israeli occupation as a strange survival of colonialism in the 21st century. Only in Israel do we hear of ‘settlements’ and ‘settlers’. Only in Israel do soldiers and armed civilian groups take over hilltops, demolish homes, uproot trees and destroy crops, shell schools, churches and mosques, plunder water reserves, and block access to an indigenous population’s freedom of movement and right to earn a living. These human rights violations were unacceptable in apartheid South Africa and are an affront to us in apartheid Israel.

We South Africans faced apartheid and exploitation, bullets and prison, not with bouquets of flowers, but with resistance. We are proud of this, our history. This is the history of all oppressed people. Why should it be different for Palestinians? Born in squalid refugee camps, living in poverty and believing the world community does not care, more and more young Palestinians see empty futures, aborted hopes and feel unbearable frustrations. The great African-American poet, Langston Hughes, asked: “What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun...or does it explode?” The shocking suicide bombings answers this rhetorical question. Apartheid Israel has created a situation in which people feel they have nothing to lose. This dangerous situation could be reversed, if the Israeli state and the one country that

funds and supports it unconditionally- the US, as well as the world community, act in a moral and just manner.

It's Apartheid Again!

We note how the Israeli state rests on overt repression, a system of structural violence and institutionalised discrimination that dehumanises one group to the advantage of another. Apartheid Israel has developed an elaborate system of racial discrimination, embedded in its legal system-even surpassing Apartheid South Africa's laws. These laws include the Law of Entry, the Law of Return, Citizenship Law, legally sanctioned discriminatory rabbinical rulings and the Military Service Law. Palestinians are denied various welfare benefits, access to many jobs, and the leasing of homes and land controlled by government bodies. We realise that while Palestinians within the '48 borders may vote, they face these discriminatory laws and are treated like third class citizens. Electricity, sewerage, roads and water supplies are provided free to Israeli households whereas many Palestinian communities in Israel, let alone the occupied territories, have existed for decades without adequate services. The Israeli education system is racist in practice and in content. Almost no Arab history is covered and there are no Arab textbooks in the Israeli curricula. Palestinians also face significant barriers in gaining access to universities. In South Africa similar factors contributed to the Uprisings in 1976 and the 1980s.

Laws governing land ownership such as the Law of Acquisition of Absentee Property and the Law for Acquisition of Land blatantly discriminate against Palestinians. Although settlers constitute a tiny minority in the West Bank, they own 60 percent of the land. Many of these settlers come from the US, the ex-Soviet Union and South

Africa. In Gaza, 6000 settlers live among a population of one million Palestinians yet they own 42 percent of the land. Land ownership in Palestine is more unjust than it ever was in South Africa. At the height of apartheid black people nominally 'controlled' 13 percent of the land, in Israel the oppressed control only 2 percent. The Israeli government also pursues a grossly discriminatory water policy. In Gaza in 1985, for instance, settlers consume about 2000 cubic meters of water per person; Palestinians are allowed to consume only about 120.

Despite the terminology, we recognise segregation when we see it. The policy of 'closures' is a policy of segregation. Blockades which allow settlers free movement but restrict Palestinians have lost 100 000 workers their jobs. Some roads are for settlers only. The Israeli government issues identification cards and car number-plates, colour coded, which restrict travel for non-Jews. Palestinians in the West Bank are routinely prevented from travelling to the Gaza Strip because they have to travel through 'Israeli' territory. No significant industry has been permitted to develop in the West Bank or Gaza. Consequently, Palestinians are concentrated in the lowest paying jobs and form a super-exploited labour force for Israeli capital. The occupied territories import 93% of goods but export a mere 7% of what they produce. Palestinian exports to Western Europe are banned so as not to compete with Israeli exports. Ninety percent of Palestinian workers must travel to Jewish towns for employment.

Israel is, simply, an Apartheid state. Apartheid laws, such as the pass system and influx control, bantustans, job reservation, bantu education and laws resulting in unequal resource allocation live on. As one South African journalist wrote after

visiting Israel: “In both countries [apartheid South Africa and apartheid Israel] ‘subordinate races’ were dispossessed of their land and crowded into marginal, drought-stricken ghettos; their movement was restricted; access to education and skilled jobs limited so that they inevitably sank into a pool of low wage labour. In both societies, bans on inter-marriage and daily lives segregated by race did little to dispel the fear and ignorance that feeds racial bigotry.”

Globalisation's Watchdog

Israel is the highest recipient of US support. In return, it makes its own contributions to maintaining the imperialist world order and stability for transnational corporations, particularly oil companies. In the '70s it supplied the military dictatorships of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua with more military hardware than the US. It supports adventures and trains personnel of unpopular regimes the US does not openly want to be identified with. The latest regime is Turkey, which brutally suppresses its trade unions, workers' organisations and the Kurds. In its illegal blockade of Cuba, the only support for the US now comes from Israel. Of course, we will never forget the support Israel provided to apartheid South Africa. While the world condemned apartheid in South Africa as a crime against humanity, Israel happily cemented trade, cultural, military and nuclear links with the white minority regime.

A Bantustan or a Democratic Secular State?

We realise that the 'peace plan' brokered by the US at Oslo, Camp David, and the Wye River were recipes for continued misery and poverty for millions of Palestinians. Rather than promise a future of peaceful co-existence they virtually guaranteed a

continuation of conflict and violence. They proposed a Bantustan, a 'state' with a dependent economy, no contiguous territory and no substantial power, where Palestinians can be exploited, controlled, restricted and confined in reservations. A dependent Bantustan alongside an apartheid state is a mockery of self-determination as it existed in apartheid South Africa and now in apartheid Israel. In Israel, no less than in South Africa, minimum justice requires dismantling the apartheid state and replacing it with a democratic secular Palestine, where Jews and Arabs, Christians and Muslims, live together with equal rights and opportunities.

We observe the stone throwing children of Jabaliya, the Beach Camp, Balata, Khan Younis and Dheisheh and we see the response to over five decades of outrageous tyranny and occupation. It is echoed in those Israeli Jews who resist the oppression of others, like Mordechai Vanunu who, in 1986, was sentenced by a secret security court to 18 years in prison for exposing Israel's nuclear plans and indirectly Israel's nuclear collaboration with apartheid South Africa.

We reject the calumny that to condemn Israeli apartheid or Zionism's 'ethnic cleansing' implies animus against Jews; or that it attempts to diminish the Holocaust. The opposite is true. As the famed violinist Lord Yehudi Menuhin told the French newspaper *Le Figaro* "It is extraordinary how nothing ever dies completely. Even the evil which prevailed yesterday in Nazi Germany is gaining ground in that country [Israel] today".

We, South Africans, extend our hands to the heroic people of Palestine. Theirs is the struggle, slingshots in hand, of David against Goliath. Theirs is the vision of a country

shorn of racist dominion. Theirs is the passion for life without oppression. Theirs is the struggle for Arab and Jews to be free from discrimination and injustice. As South Africans we understand these struggles, visions and passions. We support the demand to isolate Apartheid Israel, the right of return and reparations for the 4,5 million Palestinian refugees and the dismantling of racist settlements. We demand urgent and immediate international protection of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital toward the establishment of a secular democratic state in historic Palestine. We pledge ourselves to be part of a new International Anti-Apartheid movement against Israel.

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