

The Time to Act is Now!

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As the corpse of the Israeli version of the Oslo Two-State ‘solution’ is taken out of the deep freezer by the political chef Condoleeza Rice, in order to serve it to the congregating politicians in Annapolis, we are meeting here to discuss some real actions of resistance, which may bring about real change, even if a long time may pass before such changes are enacted. For seven long years of the Bush presidency, there never was, until now, any urgent need for talks. For seven long years, during which enormous destruction was meted out to Palestine and Lebanon, the US government, as well as the EU and the so-called Quartet, have all played to the tune of the Israeli government, making sure there are no talks, no continuation of the failed ‘peace process’ – the very process which for Palestine meant the destruction of the Gaza strip, the building of tens more settlements and the enlargement of all the others, and the completion of the illegal Apartheid Wall, which no western government was prepared to do anything about. During this period the Quartet and the west have also boycotted a legally-elected Palestinian government, and assisted Israel in starving over 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza. An impressive list of achievements, by any measure.

As we speak, other dates should be remembered – the 29th of November, 2007 – 60 years to the fateful decision by the UN to partition Palestine, a resolution which has

brought untold suffering and destruction to Palestine and its people. Since then, and in June 2007, we have marked the passage of 40 years of Israeli military occupation of the whole of Palestine, parts of Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, as well as Jordan. Despite the numerous UN resolutions which have been passed since those two traumatic dates, calling first for the return of the Refugees –three-quarters of a million– to their homes and lands, and since, for the withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Territories, nothing was really done by the international community to bring about a just peace and restitution in Palestine. The Israeli ethnic and racist state has enjoyed more military and civilian aid than any other country in the world, while the Palestinians have been ostracised and neglected. This is the story you all know, in your bones, every day and every minute. How are we to change this? How are we to struggle against the most powerful powers on earth?

When I arrived in London, in 1972, the Anti-Apartheid solidarity campaign was just building up. I did not know much about the situation in South Africa at the time, but started reading and learning about this inhuman regime immediately. A short while after I came to London, the Prime Minister of South Africa, John Vorster, has arrived to Jerusalem as an honoured guest of the Zionist state; This one-time Nazi sympathiser was taken to Yad Vashem – the Holocaust memorial to people who died in the camps. I was amazed and enraged – a Nazi racist is invited

to this place, commemorating my dead family? Why is Zionism bestowing such an honour on a criminal? This has led to a number of changes in me: I have joined the Anti-Apartheid movement, as well as started on the road which led me to anti-Zionism, and to a committed opposition not just to the injustices of South Africa, but also to the racist and militarist colonial state which by then I understood Israel to be. The struggle against Apartheid and the struggle against Zionism were related and connected for me from that point onwards. Let us please remember that in the early 1970s, the defeat of Apartheid sounded like science fiction – S A was a rich and powerful country, supported by the western nations without any compunction – the first time that the Boycott against Apartheid, and in support of the ANC was raised as a tactic, most governments were totally ignoring or disregarding the idea, if not actively attacking it. It looked like there is no way in which the ANC could win.

But it did, and we did, all of us: the final defeat of Apartheid has made all of us a little more humane, a little more just, even if there is an enormous way to go, in order to address the terrible conditions which South African Blacks languish in even as we speak. The two long decades of popular struggle against Apartheid – the armed struggle in S A itself, and the great international movement which has spanned the globe, and made Nelson Mandela the greatest political figure of the 20th century, has mobilised millions in support of the weakest group in the world.

Apartheid lost because it became the hate object of millions who understood their own responsibility for their governments' inaction in the face of such momentous injustice. Once the sporting, academic and cultural boycotts were started, and the mad war waged by S A against a number of Black states was lost, despite all the help which it got from the west, and specifically from Israel, the fate of Apartheid was sealed. When P W Botha started negotiating, he did not do so because of choice, or any guilt feelings – he had to negotiate because by then S A had no friends left. In the crucial years of the struggle against Apartheid, the whole world was educated about the iniquities and injustices, about the sheer illogicality and brutality of the South African racist regime, about its blind and useless violence. Of course, this description reminds us of another racist brutal state, much closer to us.

I wish to argue here that the **South African moment** of Palestine has arrived, and that we must use this parallel in our work to bring about just peace and restitution in the Middle East. As Israel is adopting more and more murderous policies, as it becomes more inhumane than it has ever been, as every new move makes the suffering of the Palestinians more impossible – as all this is taking place, we realise that the Israeli regime is desperate, is seeing the failure of its own measures.

Let us just think of the important failures of Israel, as well as about its success: It has consistently failed in delivering stability and security not just to the Middle East on behalf of the US Empire, but has also failed to provide it for its own citizens. In its mindless and brutal war in Lebanon in 2006, the main achievements were destructive: both Lebanon and Israel facing death and severe damages, and no amount of fighting in Lebanon has delivered safety to the North of Israel, with both Israelis and Palestinians perishing, not to mention over one thousand of Lebanese, mostly civilians. Israel has proved again, as if proof was needed, that it can destroy with great efficiency and cruelty, but cannot win, cannot build a coalition of positive forces; the war left Lebanon destroyed, not just physically and financially, but also politically. If the Israelis thought that they go in to sort things out, and establish again their Pax Zionica, all they have managed to do is to add to the substantial insecurities already present in the region. They have acted again like a Mafioso, and their results are also similar to those of typical mafia carnage – more fear, death, criminality and barbarism, affecting all around them, but also their own state and society. While most governments just sat there, allowing Israel free rein in Lebanon, people all around the world understood the madness in the Israeli position, and also remembered that within few years, this is the second war with Hezbollah which Israel has lost, the first one being the 2000 war without bullets, forcing the evacuation of South Lebanon.

Another failure is the continued inability to bring under control the Qassam rockets in Gaza, despite the murders, extrajudicial executions, using artillery, missiles and planes to bomb the densest urban area on earth with all the technology the US can afford to give them. The resistance in Gaza has not been broken, and the Israeli population in the South is suffering from this, not like the Gaza population, obviously, but more than they are prepared to countenance. The Israeli population supports the military occupation, but refuses to pay the price.

There are many other areas in which this strong society shows its weakness, and we should be mindful of them. A society which tells itself it is just, has created one of the least egalitarian societies on earth – just 18 Israeli families control 80% of all property and wealth in Israel – the Mizrahim and 1948 Palestinians are suffering poverty, unemployment and crime, and the social fabric was never weaker. While the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. This social unrest is now brewing, and will help in the long run to weaken Zionism.

But using Apartheid parallels should not confuse us – despite important similarities, the differences are even more important; While SA Apartheid was based on exploitation of the Black population by the white colon, Zionism is based on the expulsion of the indigenous Palestinian population by the Jewish colon. From the earliest days of political Zionism, as we can learn from reading Herzl's Diaries, the idea of expelling the indigenous population was there – 'ethnic

cleansing' was always a condition of making Zionism work. While the racism was similar in both movements, the aims and the end results are different.

Zionism never enjoyed more political support than it now does. This is where I suggest we must cripple it, cause it international damage, make it visibly the pariah state that Apartheid South Africa once was. Remember that South Africa was just as strong as Israel, just as unassailable. It is our task, here and abroad, to organise, educate millions of people in all countries, in many languages, to bring about the discrediting, the isolation and shaming of the Israeli state and its actions. To do so we need a long-term policy, with a number of objectives and ways of achieving them. We have to make Israel clearly seen as the barbaric state we know it to be, to make Palestine the icon of resistance that the ANC and black Africans once were for all of us. Only such a sustained action can start to reverse the power relations in Palestine, and to affect a long term solution which is just, and which includes all parts of the Palestinian nation: the 1948 Palestinians, those within the Occupied Territories, and those in Exile and the Diaspora. Israel, with the aid of the US, will continue to play games of divide-and-rule, of agreeing timetables, procedures and arrangements which it has no intention of honouring, and will continue to reinforce the settlements, and to steal more land, eject more people, make life impossible for the rest so many are forced to leave. That is what they have done since 1948, since 1967, 1987, 1993, since 2000 – any date and its story, any date and its terrifying

atrocities. Annapolis will be just another Camp David, another agreement to hoodwink the international community with, the Arab countries, the Palestinian leadership itself.

What I am suggesting is different; We all need to act towards changing the situation, to make this continued plan of weakening, splitting and breaking the Palestinians impossible, by recruiting millions of people across the world to our assistance, to struggle with us towards a just peace, towards the return of the refugees, towards a just society being built in this troubled land. Such a just peace cannot be accommodated in Annapolis, as it could not before in Camp David. The Two State 'solution' is totally discredited by forty years of occupation, subjugation and settlement-building. How can we make this understood? How can we turn public opinion from Israel and towards Palestine? Can this be done?

We have a lot to learn from South Africa and the AA struggle around the world. In order to isolate Israel we must start with a growing series of Boycotts, Divestments and ultimately, as in the case of S A – international sanctions. Nothing short of this whole process can bring Israel to accept the just demands of the Palestinians – of that I am sure. In this battle for justice, all people can participate, and will. There are now Millions of Muslims in Britain, France and other countries in Europe, for example. We must be able to reach them, persuade and educate them on the Palestine question, and ask for their assistance in a series of boycotts, boycotts in

which all of us can play a role. Then we need to think of millions of trade unionists – all could be contacted by Palestinian trade unions, and recruited to this struggle. Many will be willing to do so, and have already started doing so, in Britain. We must amplify and enlarge this action. All of us work in different occupations, and we must organise within our professional associations and bring about a change in support of Palestine – physicians will be persuaded by physicians, which will tell them about the iniquities in Gaza, about medicines and medical treatment being denied to the sick, of pregnant women dying in child birth at the checkpoints – lawyers will persuade other lawyers by exposing the brutalities and illegalities of the occupation – architects will speak of house demolitions, of the wall of Apartheid – Geographers will speak of the stolen land, of the water denied, of the environmental damage - teachers will talk about the denial of education, of free movement to the schools, of the closures making education and teaching impossible – academics will speak of the closure of universities, of the continued control by the occupation forces, of the lack of free movement, of free speech – sociologists will tell of the starvation, unemployment and house demolitions leading to homelessness. All of us will speak to the society around us, until it listens, until it takes responsibility. After all, in Britain we are speaking to the nation which has, more than any other, contributed to the creation of the Palestine problem. Historical responsibility is the least one can expect here, especially as

until now, the British government has continued to support Zionism without flinching; We must expose and use this. This is also true in other European countries. Zionism has been exceedingly efficient in exploiting the Holocaust for its nefarious ends, and Palestine should make its own problem a case for Europeans to take proper responsibility for.

Then we come to the US, the country seemingly even more Zionist than Zionism itself, the strongest nation on earth, and the one which harmed the Palestinians more than any other except Israel. There seems to be little hope there. But we should not see this as a hopeless case either. If it is difficult, then we shall have to work harder, our American solidarity organisations will have to shame their country into taking responsibility for its crimes against Palestine, for continued, unflinching and unconditional support of Israel in whatever it does, however unjust and brutal it might be. In the end, two things should be remembered and understood about the US: it is a power on the decline, and its world grip is slipping, so its total hold on world politics will be weakened in the years to come, especially after it loses the wars of Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, as it must, in a similar fashion to the losing of the Vietnam war. The second fact about America is not less important – its public is increasingly weary about its aggressive policies which are spectacularly unsuccessful. This public will be ready to rethink the whole policy of

US in the Middle East, and its scary dependence on Israel and its bull-in-the-china-shop pattern of behaviour, one which the US has emulated only to its cost.

The last, but not least, necessary condition for a success of a long and sustained struggle using BDS is the unity of the forces of democratic Palestine. At the moment, and for some while now, the divisions within Palestine only serve Israel in its destruction of the society and the land. It is not for me to criticise Palestine, but it is also true that building a strong BDS campaign depends totally on Palestine and its unity in the struggle. A divided Palestine also will bring about divisions in the support abroad, and may harm it long-term. While this is an issue for Palestinians only, those who take part in this struggle with you have also a duty to advise you on the downside of the internal divisions. This is a painful question to resolve, but I am sure the society will be able to do so. It must do so. To be able to continue and succeed in the struggle against occupation and racism, this must be done. Such unity will allow you all a single voice against Israeli atrocities, and for a total boycott of Israeli goods, services and institutions, and towards the creation of a single, secular democratic state in Palestine – a state of all its citizens, with the return of the refugees and exiled.

I want to tell you all – we can build a great campaign to support Palestine, to ostracise Israel, to clarify the conflict, and to bring about just peace, if we all do our parts.

We can win, we should win, and if we do what needs to be done, we shall win.