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Palestinians Will Not Cease to Demand their Rights



Israeli wall from the Palestinian side.

The West has long been enamored with the specter of passive resistance with tens of thousands of unarmed demonstrators facing off against a heavily armed and ruthless force in pursuit of justice.

Today hundreds of thousands of peaceful unarmed demonstrators marched towards the rim of the sealed off Gaza Strip. They got no closer than several hundred yards from Israeli snipers before shots rang out leaving hundreds of Palestinians injured and at least ten dead. This is not a movie. It is Gaza. It is Palestine.

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For more than seventy years Palestinians have tried by all means possible to obtain their rights as guaranteed under international and humanitarian law.

Over these decades dozens of resolutions have come from a wide range of international bodies, associations and NGO's in support of our fundamental rights to freedom and self-determination and a return to our homes, from which we were forcibly expelled in 1948.

Despite a romantic rewrite, dozens of respected historians and journalists including Israelis such as IlanPappe and Gideon Levy have documented the coordinated Zionist attack on hundreds of age-old Palestinian villages in 1948 as the onset of a calculated project of ethnic cleansing that continues unabated today.

To suggest that almost a million Palestinians voluntarily left their homes, schools, mosques and churches in 1948 is little more than to proclaim the earth is flat. The hurried desperate mass flight of Palestinians from the paramilitary assault upon our age-old communities is beyond honest debate or dispute.

Despite near unanimity among international jurists about our cause the world community has been unable or unwilling to provide justice for Palestinian people who live in walled-off Bantustans in our own homeland or in a forced diaspora as so-much stateless refugees throughout the world.

Meanwhile Western States have openly embraced policies that not only favor and protect Israel but empower it to continue a now decades old illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

No state has been more supportive of this historical injustice than has the United States. Not satisfied with more than 250 billion dollars in direct government aid to Israel, the USA has used its veto more than 70 times in the Security Council to prevent passage of resolutions condemning Israeli policies.

Among its unprecedented financial support for Israel, the US has provided many tens of billions of dollars in military aid and equipment that has subsidized Israeli control over the legitimate rights and aspirations of millions of Palestinians and inflicted widespread death and destruction among our communities. Tens of thousands have lost their lives, many more been injured or crippled and even more detained for years on end in a military "justice" system which denies Palestinians any modicum of justice.

Recently, in an effort to further punish Palestinian civilians for the temerity of their political will, the US Administration cut more than \$ 360 million in aid out of what was its \$ 1.2 billion annual share to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). This international aid effort provides health, education and food benefits to some 5 million

Palestinian refugees' worldwide that represent some forty per cent of the total population of 11.5 million Palestinians inside and out of Palestine.

For the last 25 years, Palestinians have tried in good faith, and in vain, to achieve their legitimate aspirations through participation in a long, complex and counter-productive negotiation process.

Because of the fundamental imbalance of power on the ground and an ever-present international pro Israeli bias, Israel has exploited this "negotiation" as little more than dilatory cover while it has continued its agenda of illegal annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Not satisfied with flooding the West Bank with hundreds of thousands of illegal "settlers" Israel has continued its systematic attack upon fundamental rights of Palestinians throughout all the Occupied Territories including Gaza.

What then has been the result of this 25 year old unilateral Israeli stall? Have we not seen the destruction of any meaningful opportunity for stability and de-escalation of violence that, predictably, has spilled over throughout the region?

Has not the delay, by design, challenged the remaining hope for our people for freedom, an independent state and a return to the homes they have been displaced from over these many years? And what of the daily life of Palestinians under occupation, whether in the West Bank that is divided into controlled cantons or the besieged Gaza Strip. Both have been turned into an unbearable hell, for all to see but for us to taste. Murder, imprisonment, siege, land seizure, house demolitions, poverty, unemployment, and denial of medical treatment and travel have become the daily way of life for millions of Palestinians.

Like the rest of the world Palestinians are a people who love life, community and family and seek only a better future for our children. However, it seems as if our collective and lawful aspiration is unacceptable to some of the world which stands by with idle interest and even less action as the occupation and injustice unfolds in plain view.

It seems few at the table of nations have felt the need to confront the Israeli aggression and its occupation which, by any definition, offends all standards of decency and international law.

Having considered our various options as well as our lawful right to resist Palestinians in Gaza have decided to launch peaceful marches near the segregation barricades that deny us any meaningful scrap of self-determination. This campaign will demand an end to the

occupation, an end to the siege of Gaza and recognition of the right of Palestinians to return to their homes in accordance with UN resolution 194, issued in December 1948.

These events which begin today coincide with the anniversary of “Land Day”, in which six Palestinians were killed in 1976 while defending their land as it was seized by Israeli authorities in the Galilee area.

In the tradition of passive resistance our activities will be peaceful and continue on the borders until May 15th, the 70th anniversary of the “Nakba”, when upwards of a million Palestinians were expelled from their homes.

All Palestinians in our homeland and diaspora including men, women and children will participate in these marches and related demonstrations that share a common theme of justice, opportunity and freedom. Our activity will be overseen by a national committee, which represents all Palestinian forces and factions as well as civil society and independent Palestinian figures and supporters.

The Committee has circulated numerous publications and directives for participants in the marches, which emphasize the peacefulness of this particular movement and the need to avoid violence or any provocative escalation by Israel. The Committee has also designated various on-site representatives to oversee our collective efforts and to ensure that our message is heard through powerful and peaceful means.

Notwithstanding our best efforts we full well expect provocation by Israel during our protests and will do all that we can to ensure its inflammatory efforts will pass without any response.

Despite our best efforts, once again, this fear proved to be reality today as Israel unleashed hundreds of rounds of live ammunition and canisters of tear gas at first sight of peaceful demonstrators armed with nothing more than their voice and self-determination.

Ultimately, Israel has long feared and challenged any and all efforts by Palestinians to expose the reality of the occupation and the siege of Gaza which certainly puts the lie to its claim as the only democratic state in the region; one that respects and protects human rights and honors the fundamental right to freedom of expression.

Against this chant stands the daily practice of occupation forces that show a completely different face . . . one built of racism, violence and systematic violation of human rights.

Recently, the arrest and detention of now 17-year-old Ahed Tamimi in the West Bank because she slapped a heavily armed Israeli soldier who broke into her home is but one of hundreds of like stories which depict life and death in Palestine. Not long ago, wheelchair-bound Ibraheem Abu Thuraya was shot and killed by an Israeli sniper for little more than

waving a Palestinian flag on the Gaza border in plain view of Israeli soldiers who control who and what may go in and out of the beleaguered home to some two million people.

Given a long and well documented history of violence in furtherance of the occupation, Palestinians have a well-founded fear that despite the peaceful nature of these marches, Israel will use them as a pretext to kill and injure more of our people. In the past occupation forces have been quick to provoke non-violent expressions of protest into violent confrontations in which our communities and children have paid a dear price for their voice.

Once again, today's Israeli attack upon our peaceful people proved that history is often the most certain indicator of what is yet to come.

Nevertheless, we will not be deterred by Israeli aggression as we exercise our fundamental rights to resist and to demonstrate so as to ensure that the path for our children will lead to a better, just and equal future.

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