

International day of Solidarity with Palestine: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

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On November 29, 1947, after Great Britain—the mandatory power in Palestine—had asked the United Nations to meet in a special session to discuss the “problem of Palestine,” the General Assembly passed Resolution 181 (II) to end the British mandate by August 1, 1948. The centerpiece of this historic resolution, however, was to partition Palestine and call for the establishment, after a transition period, of “Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem.”

This United Nations decision unleashed a catastrophe whose reverberations Palestinians continue to experience until today. Three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs—who were the majority of the population of historic Palestine—fled for their lives after experiencing or learning of massacres by Zionist paramilitary organizations, or were expelled from their homes during the ensuing Arab-Israeli war of 1948. By the 1949 armistice, the original partition lines had shifted violently so that Israel’s footprint became much larger than envisioned by the proposed partition plan—it was accorded 55 percent by the plan, but seized an additional 23 percent of Palestinian territory.

At present, the drastically reduced Palestinian land continues to be occupied by the Israeli military and Jerusalem is occupied and divided with Israel controlling and limiting access to religious sites. Palestinians originally displaced during the Nakba (the Arabic word for Catastrophe—what the Palestinians call the 1948 war when they lost their homeland) are still prevented from exercising the right to return to their homes in what is now Israel. And contrary to the resolution (and to the Fourth Geneva Convention) Israel has expropriated additional vast tracts of Palestinian territory for its own use and especially for the building and transfer of its own Israeli citizens to illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land.

Thirty years after the UN partition plan, the General Assembly passed a new resolution proclaiming an annual observation, on November 29th, to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The particular date, the UN notes, “was chosen because of its meaning and significance to the Palestinian people... Of the two States to be created under this resolution, only one, Israel, has so far come into being.”

UN Resolutions and subsequent General Assembly mandates enshrine the annual International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The United Nations describes the day as providing “an opportunity for the international community to focus its attention on the fact that the question of Palestine remained unresolved and that the Palestinian people are yet to attain their inalienable rights as defined by the General Assembly, namely, the

right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced.”

The fact is that this historic dislocation has resulted in a massive diaspora for the Palestinian people living in the Palestinian territories, Israel, Arab countries, and beyond. The total population of Palestinians numbered about 11.8 million as of the end of 2013, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. This figure comprises 4.5 million in Palestine, 1.4 million in Israel, 5.2 million in Arab countries, and approximately 665,000 in other countries throughout the world.

Despite numerous declarations and resolutions by the United Nations concerning Israel and Palestine, the status of the Palestinian people remains unresolved, precarious, and unjust. They have not attained their rights to “self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced.” In fact, about half of the world’s Palestinian population continues to live as refugees and in exile. Those who are citizens of Israel are treated as second class citizens, while those in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem live under various levels of repressive military occupation and witness, daily, the continued expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.

Although UN member states have tried since the late forties to propose and gain support for resolutions that push for Palestinian human and national rights, their efforts have largely been derailed, particularly in the form of vetoes by powerful members such as the United States. At the same time, it is also important to remember that many UN agencies, especially UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees), have played a crucial role in providing assistance to the refugees since 1950; UNRWA continues to serve as a lifeline to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

A wave of ongoing violence has included heinous attacks, stabbings, shootings and vehicular attacks causing immense suffering among Israeli and Palestinian families alike – but mostly on the Palestinian side. Illegal settlement activities and settler-related violence have continued, along with punitive demolitions of Palestinian- owned homes and structure.

136 countries recognize the State of Palestine and its flag flies at the United Nations next to those of all Member States. However, these advances are not felt by children in Gaza or by the residents of Nablus, Hebron and East Jerusalem ...What they feel instead is a lack of hope that their lives will change for the better and that they will be citizens of a State able to ensure their freedom and well-being through peace with their neighbours.

The Palestinian leader Dr. Mustapha Barghouti has argued that International solidarity day “confirms the continuity of the Palestinian uprising”. International solidarity day has seen hundreds of demonstrations and activities in solidarity with Palestine take place across the world. This highlights the international solidarity with the Palestinian people alongside the tremendous growth of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign.

International solidarity day yesterday was observed in the occupied Palestinian territories, where demonstrations swept the region. This confirms the continuity of the Palestinian uprising.

These were non-violent popular demonstrations, however, as usual; they were countered

with Israel violence. The uprising is enhancing solidarity with Palestine all over the world.

Nelson Mandela, the late leader of South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, described the issue of Palestine as, "the greatest moral issue of our time." The level of solidarity, on an international scale, reflects his message. On the other hand, Israeli oppression has now taken the lives of 103 Palestinians and injured 12000 since October. This oppression, which is now isolating and ghettoizing communities in the West bank and Jerusalem, is additional proof of the aggressive and racist policy of the Israeli occupation state. It will only lead to greater isolation of Israel in the international community.

On the side of hope, it must be noted that Palestine is currently witness to a wave of genuine solidarity initiatives. . In this month alone, the European Commission adopted new guidelines for labeling products and goods produced in the illegal settlements in Occupied Palestine (This move is a modest first step, and such labeling should develop into a total boycott of all settlements and settlers); the American Anthropological Association became the largest U.S. academic organization to approve a boycott of Israeli institutions and to affirm the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement; and the British Labour Party's National Executive Committee voted to boycott private security company G4S for its direct involvement with Israeli prisons. Hanan Ashrawi describes these actions as ones that "send an important message of hope and encouragement to our people - the popular non-violent struggle for Palestinian inalienable rights in the face of the belligerent occupier is possible, and our continued steadfastness and commitment to freedom will not end in vain".

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The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People honors all those who have struggled for Palestinian independence and all the Palestinians who have lived and died in wars, under occupation, as refugees, and in exile. A dedicated and concerted global effort will, hopefully, isolate Israel and come up with punitive measures that will compel it to surrender its asymmetric power and draw up lines of action which see the dawn of a just and lasting settlement.

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