

Mustafa Barghouti on Israel's Operation "Protective Edge" against Gaza

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Barghouti is special. He's important. He's multi-faceted. He's a man for all seasons. He's a physician, political activist, and human rights champion. He supports nonviolent resistance. He's a Palestinian National Initiative (PNI) co-founder. He currently serves as secretary-general.

PNI aims to build Palestinian unity. It does so in struggling for self-determination. It does it by promoting democratic values.

Barghouti is a Palestinian Legislative Council/PLO member. He's a former presidential candidate. Israel rigged Abbas' 2005 election to deny him. He was harassed while campaigning. He was intimidated. He was arrested. He was expelled from East Jerusalem. He was excluded from Nablus and Gaza. He was prevented from competing fairly against Israel's preferred choice.

Israel rigged things for Abbas. He lacked legitimacy from day one in office. He has none now.

Barghouti is genuine. He's polar opposite Abbas. He's a grassroots democracy advocate. He's president of the Palestinian Medical Relief Committee. It provides health and community services for over one million Palestinians annually. He heads the Health Department Information and Policy Institute. It's a Ramallah-based think tank. It specializes in policy research and planing for the Palestinian healthcare system. He co-founded the Grassroots International Protection for the Palestinian People. He formerly served as Palestinian People's Party general-secretary. He's an Oxford Research Group associate. It's dedicated to developing effective methods for positive change on security issues through non-violent means.

Barghouti is well-known. He enjoys worldwide respect. Nobel Peace Prize recipient Mairead Maguire nominated him for the 2010 award. She was "inspired by the life and work of Dr. Barghouti whose commitment to nonviolence, in his personal and public life, is truly in the Gandian spirit." Honoring Barghouti "would be a recognition of not only his great spirit of peace and nonviolence, but also the Palestinian Nonviolent Movement, which gives us all hope for the future of Palestine, Israel and the Middle East Community," she explained.

Britain's parliament passed a motion. It paid tribute to his nomination. It cited his "invaluable role...in organizing and encouraging Palestinian civil society in the fundamental principles of non-violence." It acknowledged "the tirelessness of his activities in the face of so many seemingly insurmountable obstacles that face all Palestinians living under Israeli

occupation whether that be in the West Bank or imprisoned in Gaza.”

In 2010, France awarded Barghouti its Legion of Honor (Legion d’Honneur). Napoleon established it in May 1802. It was the first modern-day order of merit. It’s France’s highest honor. It’s awarded for excellent civil or military service.

Throughout Operation Protective Edge (OPE), Barghouti debunked the official narrative. He denounced Israeli high crimes. He separated myths from reality. War didn’t start in Gaza, he said. It began in the West Bank. It had nothing to do with Hamas rockets. Israel bears full responsibility. It does so for state-sponsored terrorism.

The dominant narrative called it self-defense. Justifiable Palestinian resistance is called terrorism. During OPE, Israel rampaged throughout the territories. It did so multiple times daily. It terrorized West Bank/East Jerusalem communities. It invaded over 3,000 homes. It ransacked them. It destroyed many. It stole money and other personal possessions. It used tear gas, stun grenades, rubber-coated steel bullets and live fire against peaceful Palestinian demonstrators. It arrested over 1,000 Palestinians. They included parliamentarians doing their jobs.

Nearly three dozens are lawlessly imprisoned. They languish in Israel’s gulag. Conditions are brutal. Torture is official Israeli policy. Horrific abuses are commonplace.

OPE was much more than war on Hamas. It was war on Palestine. It was collective punishment writ large. Dozens of families were annihilated to the last man, woman and child. “Entire neighborhoods...were completely eliminated within 24 hours,” said Barghouti. Eight hospitals were attacked. So were clinics, ambulances and healthcare workers. Palestinian journalists were murdered in cold blood.

Obama and other world leaders ignored Israeli aggression. They defended its right to mass murder and destroy. “(N)ot a single word” supported Palestinians’ right of self-defense, said Barghouti. “The Palestinians are the ones whose land has been occupied for 47 years, who have been forced into displacement and refugee status since 1948, (and who suffer) from a system of apartheid, discrimination and segregation created by the Israeli occupation.” Yet nothing is said in their behalf. Reality is turned on its head.

Israeli suffering is considered unique. Extreme Palestinian misery is ignored. They dehumanized. Their lives and well-being aren’t important. They faced the world’s fourth most powerful army. They did so with light arms and ineffective rockets. Israeli began OPE. It did so lawlessly. Palestinians were victimized. It wasn’t the first time. It won’t be the last.

Instigators are called victims. Real ones are called perpetrators and terrorists. Civilians suffer most in all wars. Palestinians suffer under the longest occupation in modern memory. Palestine’s longstanding struggle affects Israel, said Barghouti. “Israelis will never be free as long as we are not free,” he stresses. What’s been ongoing for decades must stop, he says. “(I)mpunity and reality must be exposed.”

Enough is enough! No longer can longstanding injustice continue. Things must change. The official Israeli narrative must be challenged. “Please see the reality,” says Barghouti. “Look at the facts.” Truths must replace fiction. Peace, equity, and justice can’t wait.

The Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC) champions Palestinian peace and stability. It

deplores militarism, war and other forms of violence. It calls human rights laws inviolable. It wants violators held accountable.

On September 9, [Barghouti addressed](#) PSC members. He did so in London. He discussed what he saw and experienced in Gaza. "Thank you for everything you have done for Palestine and Gaza," he said. "We have been watching the demonstrations. What you have done has given the people a great amount of moral support and I hope you can continue with this, because it is very important."

"(S)olidarity work" is vital, he stressed. "(W)e have a very, very big fight ahead of us." No one can comprehend what happened without living it. "No footage, no speech, no camera, no television can really show the reality that you can see with your own eyes," he said. "Please go there if you can. It's so important for you to know the reality, and (vital) for (Gazans) to see you there."

"What happened is beyond description. Even describing it as an act of disproportionality is an insult to humanity. Describing it as an imbalance of power is also an insult. After slaughtering thousands of people and destroying thousands of homes and to speak about reconstruction and to immediately allow Israeli companies to make a profit from this is also an insult to humanity. What happened in Gaza, as has happened before in the West Bank is nothing but war crimes and crimes against humanity. What happened was nothing but massacres against the civilian population and Israel couldn't have done that without a feeling of impunity and without having impunity from international law, and this couldn't have happened if so many Western world leaders hadn't been complicit in what happened."

They support Israeli genocidal high crimes against peace. They ignore Palestinian suffering. They do virtually nothing to relieve it. They let business as usual continue. Status quo conditions remain. After endless days of meaningless discussions, Barghouti expressed disgust with "diplomatic talk."

He showed pictures of what he saw. It exceeded some of the worst WW II devastated areas in some places, he said. "This was not about one house being destroyed and the house next to it being destroyed," he explained. "This was intentional bombardment by the Israeli army and navy and air force to destroy whole neighborhoods."

Shujaya was completely destroyed. "It was a town. It was was a city with 150,000 people...Every house, every clinic, every mosque, every building was destroyed. Even a home for people with disabilities was destroyed. The destruction was beyond belief, and it is there for people who want to see. Huge buildings, of five, six, seven, eight storeys were completely destroyed. I have never seen even in films such a level of devastation. I saw one bomb which caused a half a square kilometer hole in the ground."

The toll throughout Gaza was horrific, said Barghouti. It was devastating. It's catastrophic. It includes:

"18,000 homes and buildings destroyed completely, 41,000 houses partially damaged, 145 schools, eight hospitals, 13 health centers damaged. 180 mosques damaged, 71 destroyed completely. Even cemeteries were bombarded, 10 bombarded, nine Muslim cemeteries, one Christian cemetery.

They bombarded the graves." The bones of the dead became visible. "The amount of explosives they used was beyond description. Tens of thousands of Gazans lost virtually everything. Their homes, belongings, money, papers, photos, passports, and memories unable to "be brought back even if there is reconstruction. That is what (Israel) did to people." It "insult(ed) humanity."

It mass murdered Palestinians in cold blood.

Nearly half million Gazans lost their homes and personal possessions. Their loved ones are lost forever.

Many still live in shelters. "In huge numbers."

"I almost cried when I was asked to see a girl in one of these shelters. She has cancer which has taken away her sight and she was half paralyzed. Her mother was with her also. She had to be inside the room with 50 other people. Very hot, very humid, no showers, no clean water. That's what happened to these people when they went into these shelters. We found evidence of scabies, and gastroenteritis and hepatitis. Some people decided to live in the rubble rather than in the shelters, because it was so humiliating to live without any privacy. Sometimes they still find people who are dead under the destruction. Towers, high rises, they were all destroyed. Huge devastation. This building hosted 80 families. In two minutes, it was destroyed. There was a man, 82 years old, who told me he spent all his life building a house and a family. He had a house with four stories and 28 sons and daughters and grandchildren. He went to pray during Ramadan, one evening. He came back. The house was completely destroyed, his wife was killed. All the 28 sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters were killed. 91 families were completely annihilated. 91 families were scratched from the civil records in these attacks."

If Gaza's population matched America's, "you('d) (have had) 400,000 killed and 1,934,000 injured, almost two million."

"(H)ow can a country that claims to be...civilized...that has a very special relationship with the United Kingdom, that keeps speaking about the right to defend itself, ask them, how can they be allowed to," commit mass murder and destruction with impunity. Shrapnel from its explosives cut everything. It's "all over the place." "It includes very dangerous material. Tungsten and other material that is carcinogenic, and depleted uranium."

UN safe haven refugees were willfully attacked. Israel blamed Hamas for its own crimes. It used prohibited weapons. They included "(d)ime bombs, tungsten, depleted uranium," white phosphorous that burns skin to the bone, flechettes and others. Israel wanted maximum destruction, deaths and injuries. Civilians were willfully targeted. It's official Israeli policy.

IDF attacks "destroyed water networks, sewage systems," said Barghouti.

"They destroyed the only electricity station in Gaza. And they created epidemics. Up until now, in the best case scenario, people in Gaza have electricity for only six hours a day. What would you do if you could not have showers every day because the water is so saline? What would you do in a place where 90% of water sources are polluted and salinated, and not good for human use? The devastation is unbelievable. They attacked 36 ambulances. They killed 22 first aid and health providers. They devastated eight hospitals. They killed 18 journalists and attacked seven UNWRA schools. They killed five

people in Shifa hospital. Two disabled women were killed in a disabled centre. 450 factories were destroyed. Farms were destroyed. Today there is no meat in Gaza, because all the sheep were killed in the attacks. The soil is so covered in chemicals that it's not good for human use, for farming. Israel attacked Gaza in 2006, in 2008, in 2013 and in 2014. In 2014, there was one hundred times more destruction and more explosives than in all three previous wars. Why? Because they are testing the world. They are testing you. They are testing every single person in humanity to see how much you can tolerate. This is what the fascists did before. The fascists tested humanity to see how much it would resist and now it is time to resist Israel."

Fascism grips Israel. Democracy is pure fantasy. Palestinians have no rights. Gazans face slow-motion genocide. An entire population is up for grabs. World leaders able to make a difference do nothing. They support Israel's killing machine. Israel "tried to dehumanize us as Palestinians," said Barghouti. "First they tried to dehumanize Hamas, then all Palestinians. Netanyahu even has the guts to try and compare Hamas with ISIS."

It's totally unacceptable to let Israel claim self-defense.

"This is not self-defense," said Barghouti. "This is offense. Israel shouldn't be allowed this level of impunity. Enough is enough. We have to take them to the International Criminal Court. The PLO must immediately sign the Rome Statute and take Israel to the ICC. (T)his inhumanity can't continue. There's only one way out."

Boycott, divest, sanction, isolate and prosecute Israeli officials for high crimes against peace.

"(D)ismantle this occupation and this apartheid" once and for all. Afford Palestinians justice they've long been denied.

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