

Palestine: Sixth Anniversary of al-Aqsa Mosque. Intifada Passes Still Unresolved

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September 28 marked the sixth anniversary of former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem (the Noble Sanctuary for Muslims and Temple Mount for Jews and Christians) that caused the eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada still raging today with Palestinians on the painful receiving end of most of it. From that time till now, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) committed unending and egregious war crimes and breaches of international law against defenseless Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. Instead of abating, the assaults have intensified over the past year. They especially escalated dramatically after the June 25 incident at an Israeli military post near Kerem Shalom crossing, southeast of Rafah, resulting in the killing of two IDF soldiers, injuring several others and capturing a third still held. The clash followed a series of bloody June Israeli attacks on Gaza including the widely reported beach shelling that killed eight Palestinians and injured 32 others including 13 children.

The IDF "Operation Summer Rain" response was just another deadly chapter in how Israel is allowed to get away with any excuse it uses to attack the defenseless Palestinians. Beginning in late June, that assault was swift, brutal, disproportionate to the minor incident that took place, and is still ongoing over three months later unabated. Israel followed its attack and re-invasion of Gaza by closing all border crossings and sealing off the territory to restrict movement in and out including for humanitarian supplies such as food and medicine. The IDF also began shelling northern Gaza with hundreds of rounds of artillery shells daily; it launched round-the-clock attacks by F-16 fighter jets and helicopter gunships firing air-to-surface missiles and dropping one-ton bombs on civilian targets; it conducted mock air raids; and it had its aircraft break the sound barrier over Gaza at low altitudes inflicting eardrum shattering sonic booms to terrify the population. The terror tactics traumatized children the most.

In addition, the IDF targeted and destroyed Palestinian government buildings including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Economy as well as the office of the Palestinian Prime Minister who was forced into hiding to prevent being targeted for extra-judicial assassination. Other facilities were destroyed as well including a number of educational institutions, the electricity generation plant providing nearly half of Gaza's electrical power, other electricity networks and transmitters, the main water pipe for the Nusairat and al-Boreij refugee camps, six bridges linking Gaza City with the central Gaza Strip, many roads, and the government compound in Nablus. The IDF also destroyed hundreds of dunums (each one about 1,000 square meters) of agricultural land and hundreds of houses in indiscriminate-like acts of banditry against vulnerable civilians helpless to stop it and to make it easier later to seize more Palestinian land for settler developments or whatever other purposes the Israelis want to use it for.

All the while, Israel continues building its separation/annexation wall inside the West Bank on other seized Palestinian land. It's doing it in defiance of the July, 2004 World Court in the Hague ruling that its construction is "contrary to international law....destroyed and confiscated (property and greatly restricts Palestinian movement, and it) severely impedes the exercise by the Palestinian people of (the) right of self-determination." The Court ruled construction must end at once, its existing portion be taken down, and affected Palestinians must be compensated for their losses. In its decision the Court cited binding international law under the Hague Regulations of 1907 (dealing with the laws of war and war crimes) and the Fourth Geneva Convention (relating to the protection of civilians in time of war). As it ignores all binding UN resolutions against it, Israel refused to comply with this one by the World Court and continues building its wall on confiscated Palestinian land in open defiance of the rule of law and all international norms of propriety.

In addition, Israel has tried to destroy the democratically elected Hamas-led government by seizing and arresting 31 of its Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) members including the Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Secretary. Later the Deputy Speaker was released. Also, eight ministers including the Deputy Prime Minister, were arrested. Three of them, including the Deputy Prime Minister were later released, but the others are still in administrative custody. They're being held in detention along with about 10,000 other Palestinians arrested forcibly. Most of them are being held administratively and indefinitely without charge and are subjected to abuse and torture according to Amnesty International and the Israeli human rights monitoring group B'Tselem.

Israel's assault against the Palestinians in June didn't just erupt because of a minor border incident. Israeli General Yoav Galant, in charge of Gaza, revealed in a candid interview he gave it was planned earlier, and the IDF had been preparing for it by training for a large-scale incursion and reoccupation of the Strip. It all stems from the Palestinians having made an unacceptable choice in the legislative elections held in January, 2006. They were expected to return the supine and subservient Fatah-led government to power led by Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president and traitor to his own people for having sold out to Israeli and US interests years ago for the special privileges he gets in return. Fatah lost because the people were so fed up with years of institutionalized corruption under its rule, they voted it out and democratically elected a majority Hamas-led government they had far more faith in. This was intolerable to the Israelis, the Bush administration and the European Union (EU) that refused to recognize the new leadership. They responded by cutting off all international aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and supported Israel's refusal to hand over what it owes the PA from the taxes it collects from the Palestinian people. The plan was to starve the government and people into submission, and it did it by creating a severe economic crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) preventing salaries from being paid and causing a state of extreme deprivation that's grown worse throughout the year and especially after the late June resumption of open and intense conflict.

The long-suffering Palestinians have paid a terrible price throughout this period and for decades earlier while the world community ignores their desperate plight and is complicit in causing it. World leaders are comfortable remaining shamelessly silent while innocent people are made to suffer painfully while the IDF's overwhelming force is allowed to operate with impunity. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) on the ground in the OPT has painstakingly documented the daily toll of pain and suffering. It reported 237 Palestinians were killed in Gaza alone including 53 children and 13 women since June 25. In addition, the PCHR reported 821 Palestinians, including 220 children and 35 women, were

wounded. The numbers continue mounting daily as does the human suffering overall.

In total, according to PCHR reports, over the past year, 504 Palestinians have been killed including 93 children and 14 women, 138 of them by targeted extra-judicial executions against 90 targeted persons that also killed 48 others. Covering the entire six years of the al-Aqsa Intifada, PCHR reports 3859 Palestinians have been killed including 585 by extra-judicial assassinations that targeted 376 persons and killed 209 others nearby including 71 children.

Over the past year, the IDF intensified its operations in the OPT, especially in Gaza from which the Israelis staged a media event withdrawal (under its “disengagement plan”) in August and September, 2005 evacuating 8,500 settlers from 21 settlements. In fact, no withdrawal took place. The Gaza Jews were merely resettled on other seized Palestinian land in the West Bank, and the IDF just redeployed away from the settlements they were guarding to new positions on the border. Gaza continues to be sealed off, it remains the world’s largest open-air prison, and the IDF freely reenters the Strip on any pretext as it did there and in the West Bank with brute force after June 25. The beleaguered Palestinians know no peace or relief as the IDF continues assaulting them daily inflicting an intolerable amount of pain and suffering on them.

This is part of Israel’s long-standing imperial and racist policy of collective punishment and ethnic cleansing to destroy the Palestinian identity and prevent the people from ever having a viable sovereign state of their own under a government of their own free choice. Israel’s plan is to make life in Palestine so intolerable, the people there will choose to leave voluntarily to seek refuge wherever they can find it in other Arab states. Israel could then seize their land and advance toward its eventual goal of a greater “Eretz Israel” Zionists believe belong to them that includes the ancient lands of “Judea” and “Summaria,” the West Bank biblical parts of Israel the Palestinians claim as their homeland. Despite the overwhelming oppression and hardships inflicted on them, the Palestinians have resisted for decades and courageously defended their rights – but at a great cost in lives lost, land seized, homes and other facilities destroyed and continuing human misery some independent observers believe is as great as or even greater than anywhere else in the world.

An Account of the Last Six Years Under Occupation

The PCHR documents how bad things have been just in the last six years since the start of the al-Aqsa Intifada. IDF daily attacks over that period included the following:

- Hostile incursions into the OPT
- Mass killings and home and property demolitions
- Frequent extra-judicial assassinations of targeted Palestinian resistance and political leaders
- Destruction of the Palestinian economy that’s threatened with total collapse from an economic embargo and withholding of tax payments to the Palestinian Authority (PA)
- Creation of a serious risk of infectious disease from a lack of clean water and little or no sanitation because of the collapse of the sewage system

- Destruction of a viable Hamas-led PA through imprisonments and destruction of their civil and security facilities
- Using Palestinians as human shields during IDF operations in the OPT
- Closing Rafah and other border crossings in Gaza cutting off essential traffic both ways including for humanitarian supplies like food and medicine
- Harassing Palestinian fishermen preventing them from earning a living
- Storming Jericho Prison and arresting senior Palestinian political leaders
- Harassing and humiliating Palestinians at military checkpoints including those in ambulances prevented or delayed from getting critically needed treatment
- Unwarranted and illegal deportations of targeted Palestinian activists from their own country
- Continued illegal construction of the separation/annexation wall on seized Palestinian land in the West Bank in violation of the World Court and international law Israelis never respect
- Willfully killing Palestinian civilians including women and children
- Indiscriminately attacking and shelling Palestinian civilian areas using warplanes, helicopters, tanks and other powerful weapons including illegal ones
- Denying Palestinians their basic human rights to health care, education, freedom of movement, work to support themselves and their families, and imposing a tight siege on the OPT shooting to kill those violating it or on the streets when curfews are in effect
- Making mass arbitrary arrests without cause resulting in about 10,000 Palestinians illegally held in detention and subjected to grievous abuse and torture
- Closure of charitable societies in the West Bank
- Permitting deliberate and systematic attacks by Israeli settlers living on seized Palestinian land against Palestinian civilians in their own homeland

The Collective Numerical Toll of the Last Six Years on the Palestinian People Through September 28

From September 29, 2000 through September 28, 2006 the toll is as follows as documented by the PCHR:

- 3,859 Palestinians killed overall - 2137 in Gaza and 1722 in the West Bank
- 724 children killed overall - 430 in Gaza and 294 in the West Bank
- 119 women killed - 58 in Gaza and 61 in the West Bank
- 376 extra-judicial executions

- 19 medical personnel killed
- 10 journalists killed
- 45 killed by illegal Israeli settlers with impunity
- 22,927 Palestinians injured (many severely) - 12,927 in the West Bank and 10,000 in Gaza
- 36,852 donums of land destroyed
- 2,831 complete home demolitions and 2,427 partial ones
- 677 industrial facilities destroyed

Conclusions

Justice delayed is justice denied, and for the long-suffering Palestinians the denial has lasted nearly six long and deadly decades. They've been the victims of genocide in slow motion aided by the indifference of the world community that has a large share of the guilt for failing to forthrightly say "no mas" - this no longer will be tolerated and must end. If world leaders won't act, when then will enough people of conscience and mass civil society stand together and do it for them demanding Israel be held accountable for its actions and that there must be an end to what never should have been allowed to begin in the first place.

Today the state of the Palestinian people is so dire and the need for relief so urgent, the world no longer can wait. Nearly six decades of unending persecution capped by the last six years of it becoming especially intolerable can only lead to one eventual unjust ending if not stopped too unacceptable even to imagine - the destruction of a courageous and oppressed people with a proud legacy going back hundreds of years.

A Jewish/Palestinian conflict never existed until the founding of Zionism in the late 19th century. It was structured on the myth that ancient Palestine was "a land without people for a people without land" and "God gave this land to the Jews." It's pure rubbish and ignores the wealth of historical and archeological evidence that civilization flourished in present-day Israel/Palestine at least 1,000 years before any Jews arrived. From that time till the duplicitous British after WW I promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine, for their own self-serving interests, Jews and Palestinian Arabs lived mostly in peace.

The key turning point destroying any chance for coexistence came on November 29, 1947 when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution supporting the establishment of a Jewish state. It voted to partition Palestine to create one for the Jews and the other for the majority Palestinian population. At the time, the Jews were a minority one-third of the population and owned 6% of the land. The partition unfairly gave them 55% of it and led to the 1948 Israeli war of independence the Palestinians didn't want but couldn't avoid. The outcome gave the Israelis 78% of the land, half again as much as the UN mandate, and squeezed the Palestinians even more in what became known as "al Nakba" or "The Catastrophe." Things would never be the same again and now are as bad or worse than any other time since that war and the one in 1967 when the Israelis occupied all the land now known as the OPT.

Today in the Middle East, Israel is a modern prosperous state and a nuclear power making it

virtually omnipotent in the region. No Arab state can or would dare challenge it, and the Palestinians are virtually helpless against a hostile and powerful occupier intent on their destruction as a people. When will the world community or enough people of conscience act to stop what will eventually happen if they don't. It's long past the time to end the "last taboo" of failing to speak out and act forthrightly against Israeli crimes and demand they end - or else Israel will be made to pay a stiff price for not complying. It's also long past the time Israel be held to account for what it's done to an innocent people wanting only to live in peace on the land rightfully belonging to them. If not now, when will justice ever be served. Tomorrow may be too late.

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