

South Africans Condemn Israeli Aggression Against the Palestinians

ANC, COSATU maintains long held position in opposition to Zionist occupation

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Many people throughout the world have demonstrated in opposition to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) attacks against the Palestinians in Gaza and the other regions of the occupied state.

An aerial and ground incursion labeled “Operation Protective Edge” has resulted in the deaths of nearly 200 Palestinians and the injuring of many hundreds more. The Deputy Health Minister in Gaza, Dr. Yousef Abu Reesh, reported during a press conference at Shifa Hospital that “The very high rate of casualties, either killed or wounded due to the Israeli assaults, was a result of missiles fired from war planes, artillery bombs fired from tanks and bombs fired from the sea.” (Xinhua, July 14)

In South Africa where the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and its allies have expressed outrage over the renewed aerial bombardments and July 13 ground incursion in Gaza, some groups are calling for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from the country. Deputy Secretary General of the ANC Jesse Duarte re-emphasized their position in an article published in the party’s weekly online newsletter.

Duarte wrote an article entitled “The Calamity of Gaza and the West Bank” where she articulates the ANC position condemning the police state tactics used by the Israeli police and military. This article was one among thousands published around the world in solidarity with the plight of the Palestinians.

The ANC deputy secretary general asserts that the recent unity agreement between the Palestinian Authority dominated by Al-Fatah and Hamas, which controls the Gaza strip, is the motivating factor behind the current onslaught. Of course the kidnapping and deaths of three Israeli youth and the revenge attacks leading to the lynching of a Palestinian youth Mohammed Abu Khdeir and the subsequent beating of his cousin, Tariq Abu Khdeir, who was visiting the West Bank from the United States, fueled tensions.

According to Duarte, “While Israel says it fights Hamas because it is a terror organization that does not recognize its existence as a Jewish state, it unleashes the same violence on virtually any Palestinian. It practices ruthless collective punishment. It opposes unity among Palestinians ostensibly because this includes Hamas, but it acts just as harshly against other political movements in the Palestinian territory. The latest escalation of violence against Palestinians comes just over a month since they established a unity government, which was then recognized by many world governments to the chagrin of the state of Israel. Hamas

has become a convenient explanation for indiscriminate violence visited on Palestinians before unity efforts.” (ANC Today, July 11-17 issue)

South Africa’s ruling party felt strongly that it must take a stand on the escalating repression against the Palestinians in Gaza and other areas of the occupied state. The western imperialist nations are strong supporters and allies of the state of Israel.

The regime in Tel Aviv serves as an outpost to imperialist domination of the Middle East and therefore has not suffered any sanctions or diplomatic reprisals from the governments in Europe and North America. Inside the U.S., corporate media reporting serves as a rationale for the continuing White House and Congressional funding of the occupation of Palestine and the forced removal and persecution of its people.

In this same above-mentioned article Duarte asks “Why has the international community remained mute? As the situation worsened, the UN Secretary General issued soft statements calling for restraint from both sides, even though evidence clearly shows Israel’s disproportionate use of crude force. Palestine has no serious army, no air force, and no serious weapons of war. Rockets that land on the Israeli territory cannot be compared to heavy war technology that Israel deploys with impunity on residential areas that have become legitimate military targets in the eyes of the Israeli military authorities.”

Calls for Expulsion of Diplomatic Personnel

On July 11, the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) issued a statement as well supporting the diplomatic and economic isolation of the Israeli regime. This call is in line with an international movement which seeks to impose sanctions on the state of Israel for its refusal to recognize the right of the Palestine people to an independent and sovereign nation of their own.

In the statement signed by ANCYL spokesperson Dr. Bandile Masuku, it emphasizes that “we must do more than lament and carry banners. We support the call made by our Western Cape Province comrades and call on the Department of International Relations to immediately expel the Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, Arthur Lenk, and to recall Comrade Sisa Ngombane from Tel Aviv. We further believe that SA must deny the State of Israel any formal recognition. The Department of Trade and Industry must not allow Israeli goods from an apartheid state in this country. We support a complete Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions program against the Zionist State with immediate effect.”

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the largest labor federation in the country, reprinted an appeal from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in South Africa saying “Gaza has become a field laboratory for the Israeli and U.S. military industrial complex. The latest and most vile weapons and high tech equipment is field tested on the bodies of Palestinian men, women and children before being sold to other countries.” (July 11)

This same statement goes on to stress that “Israel will continue with its barbarism. The world needs to stand up to apartheid Israel as it stood up against apartheid South Africa. The time for easy rhetoric and mere condemnation alone is over. Genuine global solidarity is required – a basic lesson of our own struggle against apartheid.”

COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi was quoted in various press reports reiterating that he was in total support of the diplomatic and economic isolation of the state of Israel.

In a press release issued by COSATU spokesperson Patrick Craven on July 10 it says “Israel is only able to commit all these ruthless atrocities because of the license from the U.S., European Union (EU) and allies. The UN must be ashamed of itself for failing humanity and the people of Palestine, always pleading for restraint from the victim, equally. We cannot equate an aggressor to a victim or colonizer to a colonized. Nelson Mandela was also called a terrorist for fighting for freedom, hence the natural task of oppressed people to wage a liberation struggle and our natural responsibility is to support them.”

International Solidarity for Palestine Continues

The ANC and its allies have maintained a decades-long alliance with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in support of the total liberation of the occupied state from Zionist Israel. When the late Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990, he met with his counterpart at the time, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, who died under unnatural circumstances in 2004.

Mandela defended the ANC alliance with the Palestinians as well as Cuba, Libya and other revolutionary and progressive forces throughout the world. A broad Palestine Solidarity Campaign has also continued to push for the isolation of the Israeli regime.

In the aftermath of the 1967, 1973 and 1982 wars between the state of Israel and various regional governments and people’s organizations including Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, many African countries broke diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv. However, since the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist governments and the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993, Israel has re-established relations with a host of African Union (AU) member-states.

When a delegation of U.S.-based pro-Israeli groups attended the recently-held AU 23rd Summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, there were protests from representatives of several continental states. After the gathering a number of articles were published internationally reporting on the negative statements made by these pro-Israeli organizations about their treatment in Malabo.

In order to maintain its position against racism and national oppression, the AU must take a stand firmly in support of Palestinian statehood and sovereignty. The South African ruling party and other progressive forces should set the standard for the continent’s foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestine war.

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