

Venezuela's Support for Palestine

A Model for Third World Democracy

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At a time, when the international community has turned a blind eye to Israel's crimes towards the Palestinians, Venezuela has been one of the few nations who has the courage to openly condemn Israel for its crimes and express support for the Palestinian people. Most members of the non-aligned movement professed support for the Palestinian cause during the cold war and severed relations with Israel as they saw the Palestinian struggle as part of the same anti colonial struggle that they were a part of. Other commentators have stated that the non-aligned support for the Palestinian cause was not formed out of any genuine concern for the Palestinian people but as a way to align their foreign policy to that of the former Soviet Union for strategic purposes or to gather favor from several oil producing Arab nations for their development.

After the U.S. imposed Oslo Peace Process began in the early 90's, the international community eagerly resumed diplomatic ties with Israel and immediately started a process of military and technological cooperation with them. Many of these nations such as India and China had admired Israel as a nation that was technologically and militarily advanced and desired to have Israel share its expertise in these areas with them.[1] This build up of military cooperation and trade made many nations change their policy on criticizing Israel. These members of the international community turned a blind eye to Israel's practices towards the Palestinians in the years that followed, including a continued displacement of Palestinians, an increase in illegal Jewish settlements, continued expropriation of Palestinian lands, political assassinations, torture, discrimination against non-Jewish residents, and sabotaging the rights of Palestinian refugees displaced by the 1948 Al Nakba genocide. Even after the outbreak of the second intifada, the international community refrained from holding Israel accountable for genocidal policies imposed on the Palestinians such as the forced starvation and economic devastation of over 1.5 million residents in Gaza or for the war crimes it committed during their illegal invasion of Lebanon in 2006. Occasional criticism or concerns would be expressed about Israel's actions but nation-states would refrain from severing diplomatic ties or holding Israel legally accountable for their crimes.

One exception to this diplomatic capitulation to Israel has been Venezuela under the leadership of President Hugo Chavez. Chavez has been outspoken in his criticism of Israeli policies and has undertaken and proposed steps to hold Israel accountable for their actions. Venezuela, like many other Latin American countries traditionally had friendly diplomatic relations with Israel. Since its existence, Israel has maintained military relations with right wing regimes in Latin America including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela. Israel has also been active in supporting several right-wing counterinsurgency groups in Latin America (acting as a proxy for the U.S.) with weapons,

advice and training in their fight with leftist governments.

Chavez, however, broke with this tradition when he announced in 2006 that he was withdrawing his senior diplomat from Israel in response to their invasion of Lebanon.[2] Chavez chose to take this course not because of any action Israel had taken against Venezuela, but because of Israel's treatment towards Palestinian and Lebanese civilians.[3] Chavez publically compared Israel's actions towards Palestinians and Lebanese to the holocaust stating that "Israel is doing what Hitler did, killing innocent children and entire families." [4] Chavez went on to stop Venezuela from issuing tourist visas to Israelis and during a trip to Beijing called for Israel to be tried for genocide before the International Criminal Court.[5] Chavez also visited Syria and made a joint statement with the Syrian government calling on Israel to end its illegal occupation of the Golan Heights, abide by UN resolutions and for an end to double standards towards Israel internationally.[6] Chavez also sent a Boeing 707 with 20,000 tons of humanitarian aid to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis caused in Lebanon and Palestine due to Israel's aggressive actions.[7] Chavez has publicly criticized UN Secretary General Ba Ki Moon for not doing enough to stop repression by Israel.[8] These statements and actions have made Chavez one of the most popular leaders in the Arab world and have led opposition political parties in Arab countries to urge their governments to copy Venezuela's actions towards Israel. [9] Venezuela previously had military ties with Israel but chose to abandon them in favor of standing up for Palestinian rights.[10]

Chavez's actions towards Israel is something that all members of the international community should be emulating to stop the genocidal policies of the Israeli government. Stephen Lendmen in an article about holding Israel accountable for international law violations stated that when nations ignore Israel's crimes such as their violations of UN Resolutions, the Geneva Conventions and the UN Charter or tacitly cooperate with it while they are committing these crimes, they are indirectly responsible for aiding their crimes and are "criminal accomplices" under Article 6 of the Nuremberg Charter.[11] Unfortunately, most nation states like India have chosen to ignore Israel's crimes during the last decade by continuing to increase military and cultural ties with them thus arguably becoming criminal accomplices in their crimes.

Also unfortunate is that nation state participation and support is required to legally hold Israel accountable for all their crimes against Palestinians and the surrounding Arab countries. The UN General Assembly can act to establish an International Criminal Tribunal for Israel like they did for Rwanda but this would require General Assembly members to act to bring about this proposal. Additionally, Palestinians can sue Israel for Genocide at the International Court of Justice but this again requires action brought by a nation state or at least consent for the suit by a nation state. Similarly, any attempt to expel Israel from the UN for defying UN resolutions and violating the UN Charter would require the action be brought by a UN member state.

It is for these reasons that citizens of various nation states who are concerned about the plight of the Palestinians must bring pressure to their governments to take Venezuela's lead and take concrete actions to hold Israel accountable for their behavior. Such demands can include breaking diplomatic ties with Israel and consenting to and supporting any suit brought against Israel for genocide in an international tribunal. Many left parties in India and other countries have already taken the lead in the area and must continue to exercise pressure on their respective governments to follow Venezuela's lead with respect to Israel.

Noted international lawyer, Francis Boyle, has also followed this strategy and lobbied Iranian officials for state consent to sue Israel for genocide against the Palestinians at the International Court of Justice.[12] Only actions such as these will serve to show the Palestinian people that the world will not turn a blind eye to the genocide that they are facing and will serve to motivate them to continue their anti-colonial struggle.

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NOTES

[1] Krieger, Mathew, "Israel-China "water-trade" to rise significantly," Jerusalem Post, November 11, 2000.

[2] Ravid, Barak, "Israel may downgrade ties with Venezuela," Haaretz, September 30, 2007.

[3] Khatib, Dima, "Winning Arab hearts and minds," Al Jazeera, 18 August 2006.

[4] "Chavez Suggests Trying Israel for Genocide," Israel Today, August 27, 2006.

[5] Id.

[6]"Syria, Venezuela denounces U.S. "double-standard policy," El Universal, 31 August 2006

[7] Mather, Steven, "Israel Withdraws its Ambassador for Venezuela," Venezuelanalysis.com, August 8, 2006.

[8] Mundial, Yvke, "Chavez criticizes Israel and Columbia for claiming right of defense to justify invasions," www.venezuelanalysis.com March 3, 2008.

[9] "Syrian Communists urge Arab leaders to Copy Venezuela's protest against Israel," Khaleej Times, August 2, 2006.

[10] Parma, Alessandro, "U.S. Continues to Block Venezuelan Defense Development," Voltairnet.org, October 26, 2005.

[11] Lendman, Stephen, "Israel Must be held accountable for its International Law Violations," ZMagazine, August 12, 2006.

[12] Gelkin, Chris, "Lawyer seeks Iran's help to sue Israel over Gaza Seige," Worldpress, April 25, 2008, <http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/3128.cfm>

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