

HOLOCAUST IN GAZA

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In February 2008, Israel's Deputy Defence Minister Matan Vilnai warned that if Hamas continued firing rockets, they would bring upon themselves a 'bigger shoah,' the word used by Israelis to refer to the Nazi genocide or holocaust. This statement came in the wake of attacks on Gaza which left 32 Palestinians dead, including eight children, the youngest a six-month-old baby. These regular attacks, combined with a blockade which deprived Palestinians in Gaza of food, fuel, potable water, medicines and educational materials, was the slow-motion *shoah* which had been taking place up to December 27. The full-scale bombing which began on that date is surely the 'bigger shoah' promised by Vilnai, and, according to Israeli reports, it was being planned as long back as February (1).

There were demonstrations against the Israeli bombing by outraged protestors throughout the world as the Palestinian death toll climbed to more than 300 in three days, but Palestinians in Gaza felt that the international community were acting as mere spectators to the massacre. They were right. Protest demonstrations are not enough to stop a holocaust. Even less effective are sanctimonious statements by the UN and EU equating one Israeli life to more than a hundred Palestinian lives, which make the outright support for the massacre by George W Bush almost attractive in its honesty. So what is to be done?

The first necessity is to debunk myths that have successfully been used to vitiate all previous actions against Israel. Firstly, the myth that the founding of the Zionist state has anything to do with the Nazi genocide. In fact, the project was conceived decades before the Nazi holocaust, and was a straightforward colonial agenda in which European settlers would evict indigenous Third World people from their land and take it over. Gandhi saw this very clearly, which is why he refused to give the Zionists his support when they approached him, despite his sympathy for persecuted Jews (2).

The second myth is that criticism of or opposition to the Zionist state of Israel constitutes anti-Semitism, and is an attack on all Jews. This is not true; indeed, Jews are among the most trenchant critics not only of Israeli atrocities, but also of the whole idea of a Zionist state. The notion that Judaism and Zionism are one and the same is shared by anti-Semites and Zionists; the former assume that all Jews are responsible for the crimes of the Zionists, while the latter assume that all condemnation of Zionist crimes constitutes an attack on Jews. These assumptions, equally reprehensible, are simply two sides of the same coin.

The third myth is that there was ever a possibility of a two-state solution. There were two models of settler-colonialism debated by the Zionists. One model, supported by very few, was the South African one, where the indigenous Palestinians, though evicted from their land and herded into Bantustans, would be allowed to remain in the country. The majority view was that the indigenous population should be eliminated, like the indigenous peoples of North America and Australia. To this end, massacres were carried out to terrorise the population into leaving, a process then known as 'transfer of population' and now as "ethnic cleansing", and ever since the Nuremberg trials considered to be a crime against humanity (3). Both sides saw Israel as swallowing up the whole of Palestine, and one look at a map of Palestine/Israel today shows that this has now been achieved, with the Apartheid wall carving up the West Bank into ghettos, while the very fact that Israel could blockade the Gaza strip so effectively shows that it, too, is nothing more than a ghetto.

If Israel controls the non-contiguous borders, the coastal waters, the ground water and air space of the proposed 'Palestinian state', if the people of Gaza can be starved and

bombed simply because they exercised their franchise to elect a government which the Israeli state did not approve of, there could be no clearer proof that Palestinian self-determination is not an option so long as the Zionist regime remains. The struggle, therefore, is not for a separate Palestinian state but, as in Apartheid South Africa, for one democratic state with equal rights for all in the whole of historical Palestine. This would solve the problem of the second-class status of Palestinian citizens of Israel, the need for self-determination for Palestinians in the territories occupied in 1967, and the right of return of Palestinian refugees, all without driving Israeli Jews out of the country. It is the only possible solution (4).

The fourth myth is that Israel attacks Palestinians in self-defence. Take the most recent massacre, for example: it is claimed by Israel, and repeated by other politicians and the media, that it was Hamas who broke the ceasefire. Yet a careful scrutiny of ceasefire violations shows that once Hamas defeated Fatah and took control of the Gaza strip, violations from its side dropped almost to zero, until Israel broke the ceasefire by an air attack and ground invasion on November 4. Furthermore, throughout the ceasefire Israel implemented a siege and naval blockade of Gaza, defined as acts of war in international law. So it was Israel which broke the ceasefire in an act of aggression, and the legally elected Hamas government of Palestine which was acting in self-defence (5). This means that in international law, the murder of each one of the over 550 Palestinians killed in the most recent massacre, whether the vast majority of civilians or the small minority of guerrilla fighters, is a crime equivalent to the crime of killing one Israeli civilian.

Indeed, even before the December onslaught, it was clear that what Israel was doing in Gaza amounted to genocide according to the Genocide Convention (1948), reiterated in the Rome Charter of the International Criminal Court (2002), which includes: '(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part' (6). The launching of rockets into Israel by Hamas was, like the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943, a response to impending extermination: a desperate bid for survival. The Zionists' hostility to anyone standing up for the rights of Palestinians led them in 1948 to murder Count Folke Bernadotte, who had negotiated the release of tens of thousands of prisoners from German concentration camps and was subsequently appointed UN Security Council mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict. More recently, their shameful abuse of Richard Falk, UNHRC Special Rapporteur on Occupied Palestine (himself an American Jew), who in December 2008 was denied entry, ill-treated and deported, suggests that only pragmatic considerations prevented them from assassinating him too (7).

According to twenty-one human rights activists (including Jews) from South Africa visiting the West Bank in July 2008, the situation in Palestine/Israel was 'worse, worse, worse than everything we endured. The level of the apartheid, the racism and the brutality, are worse than the worst period of apartheid;' 'What we went through was terrible, terrible, terrible - and yet there is no comparison. Here it is more terrible' (8). An international response at least as strong as the response to Apartheid South Africa therefore seems to be appropriate, and this is constituted by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel called for by Palestinian civil society groups on 9 July 2005, to be continued until the apartheid regime is replaced by a democratic one. This includes cultural, academic and sports boycotts, and a consumer boycott of Israeli goods (barcode starting with 729), as well as a boycott of companies investing in, sourcing from, or otherwise supporting Israel, and pressure on them to change their policies. It would also include pressure on governments to break off diplomatic, economic and military ties with Israel, pointing out that these constitute complicity with Israel's crimes (9).

There should be extra pressure on openly collaborationist regimes, like those of Mahmoud Abbas, Hosni Mubarak, and the Arab allies of Israel, which ought to be made to feel that their people will reject them unless they cease their complicity in Israeli crimes. Enormous pressure would also have to be brought to bear on the US, which assists Israel with billions of dollars annually as well as other forms of support. Given the indications that no change in US policy towards Palestine and Israel is planned by Barack Obama's administration, the pressure should begin immediately. And pressure from within the US should be augmented by international pressure.

The US economy is in deep crisis, with more than \$ 10 trillion of national debt, and the only reason it can keep bankrolling Israel is that the US dollar is treated as world currency and oil sales are denominated in it, so the US has been getting more or less unlimited credit from the rest of the world. Russia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries must be pressurised into supporting the rights of Palestinians by immediately denominating their oil sales in euro, in preparation for moving to roubles in the case of Russia, and a common Gulf currency in the case of the GCC countries. Countries like China and Japan, with their massive US dollar reserves, should make the extension of further credit conditional on the US ceasing to fund Israel as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and countries with smaller dollar reserves should shift their reserves to other currencies. Such a move is required not only by ethical considerations, but also by pragmatic ones: if the credit extended is used to rebuild the US economy, there is a chance that it might be returned, whereas if it is used to fund aggression against Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, it will never be returned. In this campaign, very little individual action is possible, and success would depend on putting collective pressure on governments to boycott the US dollar until the US ceases to engage in and support imperialist aggression. With very few exceptions, governments of the world are complicit in the atrocities being committed in Gaza, just as they were in the crushing of the Warsaw ghetto uprising (10), and strong public pressure would be needed to expose, condemn and end their complicity.

The myths enumerated above need to be challenged in every forum, along with the *more diffused* racism that constitutes their premise. One may disagree with the politics of Hamas, just as one may disagree with the politics of the British Labour Party, but it does not follow that people should condone the slaughter of all leaders and members of Hamas, their families, government employees and random members of the Palestinian population which elected them to power. The fact that the US and EU cannot see this equivalence demonstrates that they are dominated by the same racism which allowed slavery to flourish and the indigenous peoples of North America and Australia to be exterminated. Where Black people are killing Black people, as in Rwanda, or White people are killing White people, as in Bosnia, there is a chance that the UN may take action, however weak and belated. But where White people are killing Third World peoples, as in Palestine, there is no hope that it will take any action unless citizens of the world put massive pressure on their governments to support a solution which can bring justice and peace to Palestine/Israel. It is good that there have been worldwide protests against the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza, but a ceasefire would be no better than putting a sticking plaster over a festering wound, which will only erupt again sooner or later. The wound cannot heal until the infection has been eliminated by replacing the Apartheid state with a democratic one, and long-term, concerted action is required to achieve that goal.

Notes

- (1) 'Israeli minister warns of Palestinian 'holocaust'', *Guardian*, 29 February 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/29/israelandthepalestiniansl

- (2) A.K.Ramakrishnan, 'Mahatma Gandhi Rejected Zionism,' *The Wisdom Fund*, 15 August 2001, www.twf.org/News/Y2001/0815-GandhiZionism.html
- (3) The debates as well as the methods by which the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was achieved are meticulously recorded in Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2007
- (4) See the One Democratic State Group website at www.odsg.org/
- (5) 'On Sderot and Ashkelon,' *Jews sans Frontiers*, 30 December 2008, <http://jewssansfrontieres.blogspot.com/2008/12/on-sderot-and-ashkelon.html>
- (6) For this argument see Ilan Pappé, 'Genocide in Gaza, Ethnic Cleansing In the West Bank, 28 January 2008, <http://www.countercurrents.org/pappe280108.htm>
- (7) Stephen Lendman, 'Obama v. Richard Falk on Israel and Occupied Palestine,' *Countercurrents*, 24 December 2008, <http://www.countercurrents.org/lendman241208.htm>
- (8) Gideon Levy, 'Twilight Zone / "Worse than Apartheid",' *Haaretz*, 12 July 2008, www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1000976.html
- (9) For details of the BDS campaign, see *Global BDS Movement - Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions for Palestine*, <http://www.bdsmovement.net/> The website of the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) also has suggestions for action, including signing a petition in support of UN General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, who has spoken out to condemn Israeli apartheid and called for boycott, divestment and sanctions www.ijzn.net/ Information about companies linked to Israel can also be found in the *Boycott Apartheid Israel* leaflet published by the Friends of Al Aqsa at http://www.aqsa.org.Uk/Portals/0/Leaflets/LF_24_Boycott.pdf
- (10) See Joseph Massad, 'The Gaza Ghetto Uprising,' *The Electronic Intifada*, 4 January 2009, <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10110.sh>