



*Photo: Mals Svensson - Wall in Abu Dis, Jerusalem*

bartered over since 1947 with no regard for their ownership by stint of their birth, residence, contributions, achievements, and continuous ancestry going back to time immemorial. Not only were they - the majority population - driven from it, made refugees and refused their right to return home, those who remained in what was left, have now found themselves living under a brutal regime of occupation and apartheid.

Emerging out of British and European colonialism and a desire to protect Western interests, the United Nations had arbitrarily given 55 per cent to European Jewish immigrants and left the Palestinians with 45 per cent of their own country. The Palestinians did not accept this, but soon news of massacres and the razing of villages began filtering through which terrified Palestinians into fleeing for their lives. A war ensued involving the Arab states and the newly-created Israel, but it was a war for which the Palestinians were not prepared. The exodus of Palestinian families gathered momentum and became a tragic turning point in their history known as al-Nakba or "the Catastrophe". The fleeing families sought refuge in neighbouring Arab countries until they could return home. This never happened: most of them are still languishing in pitiful circumstances in refugee camps waiting for the day they can return and/or receive compensation for the terrible damage done. For those who stayed, the only concession the world made was to allow them a reduced 22 per cent of their own land. But, the Palestinians never really had it – the

West Bank and East Jerusalem was controlled by Jordan, and the Gaza Strip, by Egypt. Israel waited in the wings.

In 1967, Israel wrested control of all the remaining lands of historic Palestine when it won the 6-day war – an occupation that has continued for 40 long and bitter years and now affects some 4 million Palestinians. Israel never adhered to the requirements of international law and conventions that required it to withdraw to the 1949 armistice "Green" line once hostilities had ceased. Nor did it seek to protect the people living there. Rather, its policies and practices have intensified and degenerated way beyond that allowed by an occupying power.

Like any people, the Palestinians want to be free and independent and to live in peace: they have pursued all avenues towards that end. None of them have been successful, despite umpteen United Nations resolutions supporting their inalienable right to self-determination. America holds veto power in the Security Council and uses it always in favour of Israel. Also, the effects of the Israel Lobby's powerful influence have been felt not only in government circles, but also the media, business, NGOs, academia and even in trade unions and religious organizations at the highest levels. Therefore, as long as the world's only superpower - the United States of America - supports Israel, the international community is powerless to implement the UN resolutions. Only at the grassroots level is there a chance for people to come together and force the issue by demanding truth and justice for the Palestinians. But, time is running out.

## **Apartheid By Any Other Name**

Today, the Palestinians are facing imminent ruin as Israel embarks on yet another reprehensible program that deliberately regards the Palestinians as "non-existent". Not only are those under occupation being subjected to a worse kind of apartheid than was ever practised in South Africa, but so too are the 1.4 million Palestinians citizens of Israel who are realising, that despite Israel's claims to being a democracy, they are in fact not equal. They are the subject of an elaborate system of laws and administrative regulations that have been designed to discriminate against non-Jews – essentially the Palestinians – in order to create and preserve an exclusively Jewish state. Now, all the Palestinians are being discriminated against in favour of Jews from anywhere in the world who want to make Israel their home, including those who want to settle in the illegal settlements being built in the areas that have long been designated for a future Palestinian state.

Those deviant laws and regulations have allowed Israel to expropriate Palestinian land, confiscate their property and demolish some 18,000 homes since 1967 to make way for the illegal settlements, Israeli-only roads, prohibited military areas and the Wall. The result has been the breaking up of lush and productive farming communities and a centuries-old Palestinian society that prospered in ancient cities like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nablus, Hebron, Jenin and Ramallah. Long used to visiting and trading between these towns, the Palestinians have been forcibly stopped from moving freely by a grid of Israeli military checkpoints that make it difficult and sometimes impossible to get to work, school, shops, hospitals, or just visiting friends and family. At these checkpoints, Palestinians are humiliatingly subjected to endless waiting, never knowing if they will be refused permission to continue their journey or be detained or even die. Such is daily life for every Palestinian in the Occupied Territories.

## **The Waiting Game**

There are over 500 checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank that seriously impede the movement of the whole population. Journeys that for the most part do not even entail entering Israel, but are merely passage within this occupied Palestinian territory. A