



Soldier inspects Palestinian I.D.

some of the best citrus fruits in the world and together with a flourishing fishing industry, Gazans had access to substantial export markets and plentiful supplies for themselves. But, shocking figures came out in the World Food program's report of 28 August 2006: around 70 per cent of Gaza's population was found to be food insecure. Unprecedented malnutrition has crept into the Gazan population and Palestinian children are suffering from micro-nutrient deficiencies, referred to as "hidden hunger" by the World Health Organisation. Over a generation, these deficiencies have led to stunted growth, anaemia, weakened immune systems, and severely damaged cognition. While not dramatically noticeable at first, the signs of mental and physical retardation creep up over years. It is malnutrition on a large-scale and entirely Israeli-made.

The reason for the current sanctions are petty and without any justification on a human scale. The US and Israel did not approve of the democratically-elected Hamas government and sought to oust it by putting pressure on Western donors to impose an embargo on the \$1 billion aid package intended to give humanitarian, developmental and budgetary support. Israel stopped the monthly transfer of about \$55 million in customs and tax revenues that it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Hundreds of thousands of government workers went unpaid for more than eight months and most are still not receiving a regular income. The message to the Palestinians is that their democratic choices are only valued if they fall in line with the wishes of the Occupier and Western interests. The real failure

though has been the international community's incapacity to act with responsibility and justice to force the implementation of its own resolutions vis-à-vis Israel and to end the collective punishment of a whole people.

As Bad As It Can Possibly Be

The Palestinian situation is one frequently compared to the imaginary circumstances described in George Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-four". For the Palestinians though, it is anything but imaginary. Two, even three generations have grown up knowing almost nothing about the freedom we take for granted. Instead, they are confronted by the awesome arsenal of Israel's sophisticated military machine – the ever-present soldiers, guns, tanks, the constant whirring sounds of Apache helicopters, the sickening scream of F16 fighter planes overhead, the watchtowers, the bombs, the sonic booms, the bullets, and the unlimited power of the Occupier. But more than that, they must endure Israel's Machiavellian twists and turns that have made the situation so malevolently complex and have so demonised the Palestinians in the eyes of the world. As the occupation and Israel's apartheid policies intensify, governments internationally have knowingly used or fallen into line with Israel's designs to further their own or piggy-back on the superpower agenda for Western dominance of the Middle East. Thus, the space for the Palestinian narrative is continually overtaken by these powerful interests and so the truth rarely emerges in mainstream news. It is no wonder that people find it easier to shrug off the inconvenience of the Palestinians' existence, regardless of the crimes being perpetrated against them by Israel, and why every peace effort has been reduced to nothing and every plea has fallen on deaf ears.

Unbelievably, the world has normalised the occupation by making the victim responsible for the crimes of the occupying power. Every act by Israel is justified for reasons of security. Every act against Israel invites collective punishment on the whole Palestinian population. This happened to the people of Gaza last year when an Israeli army corporal was abducted. A massive military operation was launched which decimated Gaza's infrastructure, pulverised homes, shops and government buildings and killed and wounded hundreds of civilians. And just to punish the Palestinians for voting the Hamas

party into government, Israel also kidnapped 64 Palestinian members of parliament including 8 cabinet ministers and 22 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. A year later, they are still being held in Israeli prisons.

The audacity of Israel's policies and practices are breathtaking, though only now are Israel's true intentions dawning on a world long believing that Israel was "a light unto nations". In reality, it always was a cold and calculating plan to bring about the Judaisation of all of Palestine. The whole two-state solution was a hoax that even the Palestinians bought into with dire consequences for their people's future. And, the effects are being felt today in ways which only a very few envisaged then. While hands were being shaken on the White House lawns between Israel's Prime Minister Rabin, the Palestinian Chairman Arafat and US President Clinton to seal the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, Israeli bulldozers were ripping up more and more land in the West Bank, and illegal Jewish settlement building proceeded uninterrupted. By the time the ceremonies were well and truly over, the Palestinians began to see the awful reality of this peace. Their last remaining land had been impossibly fractured and Arafat had been given the role of policeman over his own people with a charge to stop all violence if he ever wanted to realise a Palestinian state. Israel, however – while continuing to fragment the land with its settlements - was left controlling all the borders, airspace and water - in other words, everything a Palestinian state needed for economic viability and territorial sovereignty.



Demolished house in Nablus

Perpetual Violence

Short of becoming a brutal dictator, Arafat could no more guarantee a complete cessation of violence than any leader whose people knew they had been short-changed and that they were just as completely under Israeli domination as ever before. Israeli soldiers were still present in their lives and their land had