



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE  
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

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***Women for Palestine* calls for Israel to end its illegal  
Occupation of the remaining Palestinian lands**

Today marks 40 years of Israel's further dispossession and occupation of the Palestinians. Israel continues to fragment the 22 per cent of land remaining to the Palestinians since Israel brought about their initial dispossession in 1948 and succeeded in annexing even more land than what it had been given in the 1947 UN Partition. In that time, Palestinians have suffered catastrophic losses, none more so than the loss of their homeland. Yet, while some 4 million Palestinians have had to endure the appalling conditions of life in refugee camps while waiting to return home, another 4 million have been subjected to a cruel and oppressive occupation in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, while watching still more of their land being expropriated by Israel.

Mrs Sonja Karkar, spokesperson for *Women for Palestine*, said that the Occupation has so devastated and fragmented Palestinian society that the conditions are ripe for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. "Who would have thought that today we would even think such an idea possible, particularly after the world is still coming to terms with the atrocities of the Holocaust," said Mrs Karkar.

Over 40 years, Israel has systematically increased its suffocating military hold on the daily life of Palestinians, but no government has been prepared to vigorously condemn Israel's illegal Occupation, despite UN resolutions calling for its end. Now, as the effects of the Wall and Israel's illegal and aggressive settlement building on stolen Palestinian land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem can no longer be hidden, we are beginning to hear the words apartheid and ethnic cleansing - and from respectable sources like former US President Jimmy Carter.

This year, individuals and organisations are mobilising all over the world to call for an end to the occupation. Australia is no exception. "We urge all Australians to support this protest by joining these vigils (details below) or by writing letters to the media and our politicians," said Mrs Karkar and suggested that this was a real chance to create a ripple effect that would finally open people's eyes to the inhumanity of the Occupation.

The situation for both Palestinians and Israelis in an already volatile atmosphere is explosive and never before has there been a greater need for people to come together and demand a resolution of the conflict that will bring justice to the Palestinians and peace to the region. Australia is very well placed because of its close friendship with Israel to urge a return to peace talks with the Palestinians and begin a process that will once and for all end Israel's apartheid policies and practices.

"We are hoping that our government will see Australians come out strongly in support of the Palestinians and re-think its position on Israel," said Mrs Karkar. "I don't think anyone wants to return to those dark days of apartheid that rallied much of the world to boycott South Africa. We're hoping that a lot of lessons have been learned since then. The Palestinians have the same rights as all people to pursue justice and seek freedom, peace and dignity in their own land. It is time for Australia and the international community to call Israel to account for what it is doing in the Occupied Palestinian Territories."