



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

The following is a speech given to the
South African Parliament

by Minister Ronnie Kasrils, MP

on 6 June 2007:

Madam Speaker, Honourable members, this speech is dedicated to the memory of David Rabkin, South African freedom fighter, who died in Angola.

Forty years ago this week Israel's military unleashed lightning attacks against Egypt, Jordan and Syria, alleging provocations as justification for its strikes.

Within six days the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Golan Heights had been captured.

Apart from the Sinai from which Israel withdrew in 1977, the other areas remain under Israeli military occupation and control to this day.

Whilst some justify Israel's actions on the grounds of pre-emptive self-defence, the obverse was the truth. From the horse's mouth we learn whom the aggressor was:

Israel's military Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin stated: "I do not believe that Nasser wanted war. The two divisions he sent into Sinai on May 14 [1967] would not have been enough to unleash an offensive against Israel. He knew it and we knew it." [1]

Menachem Begin, later Israel's Prime Minister, reminisced that the Egyptian army deployment in the Sinai did not prove that Nasser was about to attack Israel. "We must be honest," he explained. "We decided to attack him." [2]

General Moshe Dayan explained that "many of the firefights with the Syrians were deliberately provoked by Israel." He said that the kibbutz residents who pressed the Government to take the Golan Heights ... did so less for the security than for the farmland ..." [3]

These are clearly statements of an aggressor. Nevertheless, some claim that Israel is justified and obligated, from its birth as a state in 1948 in fact, to defend its land and people by force whenever necessary. But where is the morality in this? Fortress Israel, a militarist aggressive state, defends a stolen land that belonged to another people.

Moshe Dayan unabashedly explained:

"Before [the Palestinians'] very eyes we are possessing the land and villages where they, and their ancestors, have lived ... We are the generation of colonizers, and without the gun barrel we cannot plant a tree and build a home." [4]

Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, stated in the 1950s:

"Why should the Arabs make peace? If I was an Arab leader, I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: We have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them. Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, its true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis ... but was that their fault? They only see one thing: we came here and stole their country." [5]

Such statements contextualise Israel's position and show it has not been interested in real peace terms. In 1897 the founding father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, stated that once in power the aim would be to: "Spirit the penniless population (the Palestinians) across the borders." [6]

Therein lies the fundamental cause of the conflict -- lest anyone remains unclear. It stems from the Zionist world view -- its belief in a perpetual anti-Semitism that requires that Jewish people around the world -- a faith group -- should have a national home of their own. The biblical narrative was evoked to proclaim Palestine as the promised land reserved exclusively for God's "chosen people" and their civilizing mission. It sounds all too familiar as a vision the Voortrekkers had in this country. It gives rise to racism, apartheid and a total onslaught on those who stand in your way, whether blacks or Arabs or red Indians. Many Jews do not agree with this Zionist world view, and declare that being anti-Zionism and critical of Israel does not equate with anti-semitism.

Far from being a land without people, as Zionist propaganda falsely proclaimed, to attract and justify colonial settlement, the fact was that an indigenous people -- the Palestinians -- lived there, developed agriculture and towns since the Canaanite Kingdom over 5,500 years ago.

Indeed a delegation of skeptical Vienna rabbis traveled to the Holy Land in 1898 to assess the Zionist vision and cabled home: "The Bride is indeed beautiful but already married." [7]

This did not deter the Zionists who plotted to abduct the bride and murder or expel the groom by whatever means necessary; and then defend what they had stolen at all costs by creating a supremacist Fortress State.

That exactly sums up the bloody and tragic history that befell the Palestinian people, and their Arab neighbours, at the hands of a rapacious, expansionist Zionist project that has been the source of war and untold suffering in the Near East for the past sixty years, and is the root cause of the conflict that threatens the entire region and beyond.

With the adoption of the United Nations Partition Plan of November, 1947, a Jewish homeland was accorded 56 percent of the territory although they owned only seven percent and were one-third of the population (most of whom had recently arrived as Holocaust refugees from Europe). The Palestinian majority were given 44 percent and were never consulted nor had they anything to do with the abominable suffering of the European Jews. The Zionists accepted partition with alacrity but never intended to honour the decision.

According to the Zionist's strategy, which has become public record with the declassification of documents, the intention was to roll-out a systematic reign of terror, massacres, dispossession and expulsion. This drove out the Palestinian population in a horrific episode of ethnic cleansing that saw over 750,000 or two-thirds of the indigenous people at that time becoming penniless refugees, as Herzl had promised. By the 1949 Armistice the Israeli state had expanded to 78 percent of the territory.

That was almost 60 years ago. The result of Israel's war of aggression of forty years ago this week, an extension of 1948, saw Israeli military occupation of the remaining 22 percent of the land.

The people within the West Bank and Gaza are literally imprisoned under the most unjust conditions suffering hardships and methods of control that are far worse than anything our people faced during the most dreadful days of apartheid. In fact any South African, visiting what amount to enclosed prison-ghettoes -- imposed by a Jewish people that tragically suffered the Nazi Holocaust -- will find similarity with Apartheid immediately coming to mind; and even more shocking, comparisons with some of the methods of collective punishment and control devised under tyrannies elsewhere. An Israeli cabinet Minister, Aharon Cizling, stated in 1948, after the Deir Yassin Massacre:

"Now we too have behaved like Nazis and my whole being is shaken."
[8]

If anyone has any doubt what the 1948 and 1967 wars were about, listen to Ben Gurion who stated in 1938: "after we become a strong force, as the result of the creation of a state, we shall abolish partition and expand into the whole of Palestine."

And mark these words of Moshe Dayan:

"Our fathers had reached the frontiers which were recognized in the UN Partition Plan of 1947 [56 percent of the land]. Our generation reached the frontiers of 1949 [78 percent of the land]. Now the Six Day Generation [of 1967] has managed to reach Suez, Jordan and the Golan Heights. This is not the end." [9]

Indeed the saga of agony for the Palestinians continues, inevitably creating insecurity for Israelis as well; because as we know from our own South African experience -- injustice and repression generates resistance. It is no good blaming the victims when they hit back.

The Palestinian people's fate clearly reflects that of South Africa's indigenous majority during the colonial wars of dispossession of land and property, and the harsh discrimination and suffering of the apartheid period classified as a crime against humanity and violation of international humanitarian law. Israel is as guilty as the Apartheid regime. Israel's conquest and occupation, with the latest land grab caused by its monstrous Apartheid Wall and continued construction of the illegal settlements has reduced the West Bank into several disconnected pockets amounting to 12 percent of former Palestine. No wonder that Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Tutu and others compare the situation to Apartheid and the infamous Bantustans -- which gave 13 percent of land for South Africa's indigenous people.

This people's Parliament should be unanimous in calling for Israel's immediate withdrawal from the occupied territories -- lifting the physical, economic and financial blockade and siege of Gaza and the West Bank -- removing the physical impediments to the freedom of movement of Palestinians including the Wall and over 500 check-points - dismantling the illegal settlements -- releasing 10,000 political prisoners (113 women and children amongst them) -- negotiating a just solution with the elected representatives of the Palestinian people and implementing the UN Resolutions, including Resolution 194 of 1948, concerning the Right of Return of the Refugees. These are necessary steps to create lasting peace, justice and security for Palestinians and Israelis alike, reinforced by international guarantees, so they may live in harmony. Since 1988, when Chairman Yasser Arafat and the PLO agreed to accept 22 percent of historic Palestine in the interests of peace they show they have been ready for negotiations.

Let us unanimously extend our solidarity and support to the forty-two members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, including the Speakers of the West Bank and Gaza, who together with ten Ministers have been summarily detained without trial, most for nearly a year, by the Israeli security forces. This is a shocking illustration of Israel's disrespect for parliamentary democracy, the law and basic human rights so reminiscent of what we suffered under apartheid. We call for their immediate and unconditional release; and all prisoners held by both sides.

In support of these demands let us join with the people of our country, and the international community, in the solidarity marches, rallies and demonstrations this week, the 40th anniversary of Israel's unjust occupation. And we make it clear to our Jewish community, these peaceful and disciplined actions, are aimed solely at that government. The struggle for freedom and justice is against a system and not a people.

Let me conclude with the words of President Mandela, who declared in 1998 during the visit to South Africa by Chairman Yasser Arafat:

"We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." [10]

Endnotes

- [1] David Hirst, The Gun and the Olive Branch
- [2] Naom Chomsky, The Fateful Triangle
- [3] New York Times, 11 May 1977
- [4] Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, Original Sins: Reflections on the History of Zionism and Israel
- [5] Nathan Goldman, The Jewish Paradox
- [6] The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, Vol 1, p 86
- [7] Avi Shlaim, The Iron Wall
- [8] Tom Seger, The First Israelis
- [9] London Times, 25 June 1969
- [10] Speech by Nelson Mandela at the Banquet in Honour of President Yasser Arafat of Palestine on 11 August 1998

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