



“We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.”

—President Nelson Mandela, Pretoria, December 4, 1997

Why “Apartheid” Applies to Israeli Policies

OCCUPATION OF PALESTINIAN LANDS, DENIAL OF PALESTINIANS’ EQUAL RIGHTS

What is “apartheid”? Why do Nobel peace laureates like South African President Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and President Jimmy Carter use that word to describe Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians?

The word “apartheid” is the Afrikaans word for “apartness” or “separate.” The term came into use in the 1930s, and in 1948 became the official policy of the white South African government, and referred to the system of segregation institutionalized to maintain the supremacy of white South Africans over non-whites.

In 1973, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the **International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid**, defining it as a crime against humanity, not specific to South Africa. The crime of

apartheid is defined by “inhuman acts” designed to impose racial segregation and discrimination on a targeted group. The acts specified include denying life and liberty; inflicting physical or mental harm; torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment; illegal arrest and imprisonment; denying participation in political, social, economic and cultural life of the country; denying basic human rights of education, nationality; freedom of movement and residence; freedom of speech and assembly; rights to work, form trade unions, to leave and return to their country. The Convention also prohibits acts “designed to divide the population...by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups, the prohibition of mixed marriages...the expropriation of landed property,” and finally, measures that deprive people and organizations of their “fundamental rights and freedoms because they oppose apartheid.”

Some argue that because the term “apartheid” is so fraught with history and so compelling in evoking injustice, it should not be used against Israel, because Jews were themselves victims of the great historical injustice of the Holocaust. But criticism of Israel is not the same as criticism of Jews. Israel may define itself as a “Jewish state” or the “state of all the Jews in the world,” but Israel is in fact a powerful, modern nation-state, which must be held accountable like any other country both for its accomplishments and for its violations of international law.

Many Jews, in Israel, in South Africa, in the U.S., and elsewhere around the world, reject the claim that Israel speaks for them. They believe that precisely because the term “apartheid” so powerfully describes the effect of Israeli policies on Palestinians it *should* become the term of choice to describe the Israeli system that results in occupation of Palestinian land and denial of Palestinians’ equal rights.

“Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state.”

—Former South African President Hendrick Verwoerd, *Rand Daily Mail*, November 23, 1961

Certainly there are historical and political differences between the practices of South African apartheid, and the system of discrimination against Palestinians that Israel practices. In South Africa, the indigenous Black population was deprived of citizenship and the vote, while in Israel, Palestinians who were not expelled in 1948 (19 percent of the current population) are citizens, can vote and sit in the Knesset.

But there are significant parallels as well. In South Africa, people were classified as “white” or as “non-white” (African, Coloured or Asian); in Israel they are classified as “Jew” or “non-Jew”. Members of these categories in apartheid South Africa and Israel have different birth certificates, residence requirements and a very unequal access to land, education and social and economic privileges. In both societies, laws divide mixed families.

One of the most important parallels, though, is the fact that South African apartheid and Israeli apartheid fundamentally concern the control of land. South African legislation such as the

END THE OCCUPATION

US CAMPAIGN TO END THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION

The US Campaign is a diverse coalition of over 200 groups working for freedom from occupation and equal rights for all by challenging US policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Campaign is based on human rights and international law, providing a non-sectarian framework for everyone who supports its *Call to Action*. Its strategy is to inform, educate, and mobilize the public so as to change the US role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Group Areas Act reserved 87 percent of the land for the minority white population and confined Black workers to urban townships, labor camps or distant “Bantustans”. Their movement was controlled through a pass system, similar to that used to monitor the movement of Palestinians.

In Palestine, the Zionist goal of controlling as much land as possible without Palestinians led to the large-scale expulsions of 1947-48 and 1967. Jews, only a third of the overall population legally owning approximately 7 percent of the land in 1948, claimed control of 78 percent of historic Palestine for the State of Israel. Within Israel proper, land expropriated from Palestinians was reserved for the exclusive use of Jews—not for all Israeli citizens. Today, 92 percent of Israel’s land is defined as the “inalienable property of the Jewish people.” Jews anywhere in the world have a “right to return” and claim citizenship, while Palestinians who were expelled from their homes are denied the “right to return” guaranteed by international law.

Former President Jimmy Carter defines apartheid as the “forced separation of two peoples in the same territory with one of the groups dominating or controlling the other.” This accurately describes the situation in the occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, where Israeli settlers and soldiers totally dominate the indigenous Palestinian population. The policies Israel has implemented to carry out its 40-year-old occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and expropriate Palestinian land closely mirror the “inhuman acts” that make up the UN Convention on the “Crime of Apartheid.”

For 40 years, Israel has built settlements, available only for Jewish Israelis, and now the West Bank’s Apartheid Wall, all on huge swathes of stolen Palestinian land. There is a dual legal system in the territories. Palestinians who live in the West Bank are controlled by Israeli military law; the 220,000 Israeli settlers there are governed by Israeli civil laws. In occupied East Jerusalem, Palestinians are only considered “residents” who can vote in municipal, but not national elections; the 200,000 Israeli settlers in occupied East Jerusalem, like the West Bank settlers, are

citizens of Israel, with the right to vote, run for office, and seek redress in Israeli courts. Israeli military authorities control virtually all the land and water of the West Bank, and keep the entire Gaza Strip in a permanent state of siege.

Palestinians under occupation meanwhile live completely separate lives from the Israeli settlers in the same territories:

- They face constant threat of arrest, interrogation, and incarceration, often for “administrative detention” without

“If you changed the names, the description of what is happening in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would be a description of what is happening in South Africa.”

—South African Archbishop Tutu, 1989 speech in a New York synagogue

trial or conviction, under conditions of military justice; Israeli settlers face no such threat.

- Palestinian towns, cities and villages face the imposition of collective punishment (explicitly prohibited by the Geneva Conventions) in the form of extended curfews, closures, military raids and more, either following an alleged act of violence or for no reason at all; Israeli settlers face no such collective punishment.
- Palestinian land ownership and use for agriculture, residence or any other purpose is at all times subject to confiscation for military and economic purposes, often to expand existing or establish new Jews-only settlements, and to seize control of the most important water sources.
- Palestinians are subject to house demolitions and destruction of agriculture land including the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of centuries-old olive trees; Israeli settlers are safe from such punishments.
- Palestinians are prohibited from using the network of settler-only by-pass roads which separate Palestinian towns

and villages from each other and on which only settlers and soldiers are allowed to drive; vehicles belonging to Palestinians are distinguished from Israeli-owned cars by differently-colored license tags.

- Palestinians are subject to a network of 750 or so permanent and “flying” military checkpoints at which they often wait for hours and must show their identity cards or passes; settlers and other Israelis are allowed

immediate passage through the checkpoints.

The impact of Israel’s settlement activity and the route of the Wall have drawn a vivid analogy with the apartheid across the landscape of the West Bank and the imprisoned Gaza Strip. Palestinian territory has been fragmented into truncated Bantustans resembling in miniature those “homelands” for Black South Africans created by apartheid rulers to deal with what they regarded as their “demographic problem.”

In the words of the South African Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils, “With the illegal Jewish settlements, security road network, and construction of the monstrous wall around the militarily occupied West Bank, the remaining Palestinians are ghettoized within 12 percent of their original territory. This dispossession is reminiscent of Apartheid and its 13 percent of Bantustan homelands...May Israelis wake up and see reason, as happened in South Africa, and negotiate peace.”