



There is a sea change in solidarity circles around the world about how to describe Israel's policies towards Palestinians. As Bruce Dixon recently wrote in "Israeli Apartheid," a piece posted on *The Black Commentator*, "When you google the terms Israel + apartheid you get 5.5 million hits. A lot of somebodies somewhere are making the connection without the help of CNN, ABC or Fox News."

Why Apartheid?

ANSWERS TO COME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY US CAMPAIGN MEMBER GROUPS

But South African apartheid ended over a decade ago—why apply the word today to what Israel is doing?

We can look to former President Jimmy Carter and his new best-selling book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* for part of the answer. Carter says that today apartheid (which means "apartness" in Afrikaans) is being followed "with two peoples occupying the same land but completely separated from each other, with Israelis totally dominant." He quotes an unnamed "prominent Israeli": "I am afraid that we are moving toward a government like that of South Africa, with a dual society of Jewish rulers and Arab subjects with few rights of citizenship. The West Bank is not worth it." Carter goes on: "An unacceptable modification of this choice, now being proposed, is the taking of substantial portions of the occupied territory, with the remaining Palestinians completely surrounded by walls, fences, and Israeli

checkpoints, living as prisoners within the small portion of land left to them."

South Africa had a name for the impoverished fragmented land to which Black Africans were consigned under apartheid: "Bantustan." In order to reserve over 80 percent of the land for the minority "white" population, the apartheid system restricted all "non whites" to specific areas, deprived the majority African population of citizenship, and forced Africans to be "citizens" of impoverished "homelands" or Bantustans. In 1976 the white South African government insisted that the islands of land called Bantustans were "independent states." But not a single country recognized them as such.

But why does it help our activism to bring this subject up now?

Today, the Israeli-US propaganda machine portrays Israel as seeking a realistic peace solution even as it continues to expand West Bank settlements and build what Palestinians refer to as the Apartheid Wall. President Bush stated that the Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's "bold ideas" for dismantling a handful of settlements while annexing the main settlement blocs and completing the prison Wall "could lead to a two-state solution." But as Jimmy Carter recognizes, this would be nothing less than an apartheid solution. The enclaves called "the state of Palestine" would not be economically viable, and Israelis—like the apartheid rulers in South Africa—would maintain ultimate control over the perimeter fences caging the population much as they do in Gaza today. By using the apartheid analogy, we can remind the world that they said NO to Bantustans in South Africa, and must say NO to Bantustans in Palestine today.

But can't the case be made that Israel is not deliberately creating Bantustans, but is forced by Palestinian violence to use walls

and checkpoints to protect its own citizens?

Even during the Oslo years, before there had been a single Palestinian suicide bombing, Israel's policies in the West Bank and Gaza resembled those of apartheid. Under the Oslo Accords the West Bank was fragmented into separate territorial spheres, the Gaza Strip surrounded by a high tech fence, and Palestinians given "limited autonomy" in name only, with Israel always in control. It set up a complicated dual system of documentation resembling the South African "pass" system, a dual system of justice (one for settlers, one for Palestinians), and a dual road system (with Israeli-only bypass roads bisecting the territories). And it was during the Oslo years that Israel doubled the number of its settlers, appearing bent on establishing the sort of "facts on the ground" that rule out the creation of a viable Palestinian state. The territories were being carved into Bantustan-like enclaves to give Israel control of the best land and water resources, and to sever "Greater Jerusalem" from the West Bank.

But won't the apartheid analogy be easy to discredit since Israel—unlike apartheid South Africa—has the trappings of being a democratic country?

It is true that unlike Black South Africans under apartheid, Palestinians within the State of Israel do have Israeli citizenship and can vote and participate in the Knesset. But this does not mean they are equal, either in practice or in law.

Among the "pillars of apartheid" in South Africa were laws dividing South Africans into different racial categories, restricting where "non whites" could live, and enforcing segregation. In Israel, there are two broad categories of "nationality": "Jew" and "non Jew." People in these categories have different birth certificates,

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.

identity cards, residence requirements, and very unequal access to land and rights. Jews anywhere in the world have a “right to return” to Israel, while Palestinians whose families lived in what is now Israel for centuries and are refugees do not, in spite of the guarantee under international law of their “right of return.” Ninety-three percent of the land is reserved for Jews by the Jewish National Fund and Israeli Lands Authority. Jews and non Jews have different social and economic privileges. Palestinian Israelis face systematic discrimination in housing, education, health, the criminal justice system, economic opportunities and municipal services, similar to the African-American experience under “Jim Crow segregation.” And if Palestinian Israelis marry Palestinians from the occupied territories, their husbands or wives cannot live with them in Israel.

Given these similarities, what was the relationship like between the State of Israel and apartheid South Africa? Can that relationship help us make the case for opposing Israeli apartheid practices?

It was extremely close. As Israeli professor Beit-Hallahmi wrote in his 1987 book, *The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why*, “Many countries conduct business with South Africa, and many countries support the survival of apartheid in various ways, but only Israel’s support is so direct and unreserved. Only in Israel are red carpets rolled out for the visits of South African leaders,” a reference to the April 1976 official visit to Israel of South African Prime Minister John Vorster. Vorster, who had been imprisoned by the British for pro-Nazi activities which he never repudiated, stated that “Israel and South African have one thing above all else in common: they are both situated in a predominantly hostile world inhabited by dark peoples.”

Beit-Hallahmi and other writers have described how Israel offered South Africa assistance “with everything from public relations to military and counterinsurgency measures.” Israel helped South Africa evade sanctions in the 1980s and was apartheid South Africa’s “closest military ally and its source of inspiration and technology”—including in the development of nuclear weapons.

Educating people about these

connections should help us engage some of the constituencies that played such an important part in the US anti-apartheid movement, not least the Congressional Black Caucus.

But even if there was this close connection between Israel and the apartheid state and there are obvious parallels between the practices of the two countries, apartheid as a system was unique to South Africa. How can we justify taking the word out of its context?

Although apartheid is identified with South Africa, decades ago the United Nations took steps to “universalize” its meaning. On November 30, 1973, the UN General Assembly adopted the “International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid,” which entered into force in July 1976. This Convention emphasizes that the “crime of apartheid”—which was defined as a crime against humanity—was not exclusive to South Africa. Instead, it “shall include similar policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination as practiced in southern Africa.” It lists various “inhuman acts” committed to establish and maintain domination by one “racial group” (which Israel terms a “demographic group”) over any other racial group, resulting in its systematic oppression. The list starkly mirrors Israeli policies towards Palestinians.

The policies are similar, but the intensity of repression shocked one Jewish South African who visited the Palestinian territories in 2004. Ronnie Kasrils had been a commander in the African National Congress’ military wing and is currently the South African Intelligence Minister. “This is much worse than apartheid,” he said. “The Israeli measures, the brutality, make apartheid look like a picnic. We never had jets attacking our townships. We never had sieges that lasted month after month. We never had tanks destroying houses. We had armoured vehicles and police using small arms to shoot people but not on this scale.” (Quoted in the UK *Guardian*, February 7, 2006).

How will using the apartheid analogy strengthen solidarity efforts?

The movement against South African apartheid, launched in London in 1959, worked for the total isolation of the

apartheid system, including a boycott of South African products, an end to sports, academic and cultural contacts, an end to bank loans, military and economic ties and the purchase of Krugerrands, divestment from companies with ties with South Africa and government-imposed sanctions. After international support for the movement dramatically increased when South Africa imposed a State of Emergency in 1985, South African business leaders pushed for negotiations with Nelson Mandela, who was for years considered “terrorist number one.”

A call for a new movement against Israeli apartheid was launched at the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa in August 2001. Since then prominent South African organizations, including churches and unions, and groups around the world have taken up the call.

On July 9, 2005, the first anniversary of the International Court of Justice’s advisory opinion on the illegality of Israel’s wall, 171 Palestinian political parties, trade unions, professional associations and other civil society organizations issued a Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), to be directed against Israel until it fully complies with international law and universal principles of human rights. The call sought the support of conscientious Israelis and the international community.

Adopting the apartheid analogy will allow us to answer that call in a way that can resonate with activists, connect with constituencies that were involved in the long struggle against apartheid and “Jim Crow” segregation and heighten our visibility. Framing our actions in apartheid terms will enable us to put significant pressure on Israel and US policy-makers, whether or not specific BDS campaigns succeed. And it will enable groups here in the US to play a pivotal role in the building of a mass movement against Israeli apartheid, with an international conference being planned for London in September 2007.