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RIGHTS UNDER SIEGE: A GLOBAL CALL FOR JUSTICE IN PALESTINE

Issue 328 | October 2025

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Message from the Editor

The recent hostage exchange freed close to 2,000 Palestinians from Israeli prisons, 1,700 of whom had been held without charge – yet not been deemed "hostages" by the international community. There remain in Israeli prisons more than 400 child prisoners among around 9,100 prisoners, with 3,380 being detained without charge or trial. The freed Palestinians report widespread torture that ranges from sleep deprivation to brutal beatings that have broken bones and led to unconsciousness, as well as the deprivation of food, water, and essential medications. The returned bodies of more than 50 Palestinians, who had been abducted during the Gaza war and perished in Israeli prisons, show signs of torture and summary execution, mutilated to unrecognition. Israel is not even trying to hide these crimes. In the first week following the ceasefire, at least 23 Gazans trying to return to their homes, or what remains of them, have been killed, with soldiers claiming to have felt threatened because these people had crossed the rubble into unmarked zones deemed off-limits by the Israeli army, as Israel confines the starving population to only 42 percent of the Strip. Moreover, Israel is again restricting the entry of humanitarian aid amid accusations that Hamas violates the ceasefire by not having delivered the bodies of all Israeli hostages – as they are buried under the rubble. We can only hope that the feeble ceasefire will hold and that Western governments will finally follow up on the recognition of a Palestinian state with the demand for true peace that respects the rights of Palestinians to peace, security, and self-determination. The sad truth is that this is unlikely unless public pressure continues, as Israel's routine violations of international law have been widely exposed.

This issue of *TWiP* covers the difficulties Palestinians have faced in obtaining their rights, as their land is brokered between global power players, and the United Nations is not capable of delivering aid or bringing about a positive change, which either reflects the overpowering influence of Israel's lobby abroad or exposes the colonial mindset that prevails among Western governments as they remain complicit in the genocide.

While *TWiP* goes to publication yet again without a sponsor, we thank both those who use these pages to advertise their services as well as this issue's authors, including Omar Da'na, an independent policy advocacy and human rights expert; Rami G. Khouri, a Palestinian American journalist, author, and analyst; Diana Alzeer, a human rights defender and communications professional; Alexis Deswaef, a lawyer in Brussels and at the International Criminal Court who joined the recent Sumud Flotilla; Dr. Dalal Iriqat, an associate professor at the Arab American University Palestine; Dr. Terry Rempel, an independent scholar whose current research interests include the study of Palestinian refugees; Gaza's Al Mezan Center for Human Rights; Dr. Oroub El-Abed, a nonresident fellow at the Centre for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies in Doha; Pax Christi International; UNFPA; the European Legal Support Center, the first and only independent organization defending and empowering the Palestine solidarity movement across Europe; and Marie-Louise Winbladh, an archaeologist, writer, and researcher. This issue features the poem "Ceasefire" by Ahmed Masoud; our books of the month are *Archaeology as a Weapon* and *We Are Not Numbers*; and our Artist of the Month is Reem Al-Natsheh.

The late publication of this issue is due to an illness, and our entire team wishes our designer a continued speedy recovery! We depend on your support, not only for our sustainability but also for the implementation of the rights of Palestinians to true statehood, and we are grateful to all who are speaking out,

Tina Basem



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THIS WEEK IN Palestine

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Universality of Rights Under Siege

The UN in the Face of Genocide and the Palestinian Struggle for Justice



By Omar Da'na

The United Nations was founded on the ashes of World War II, pledging "Never Again" to genocide and enshrining the universality of human rights. Seventy-five years later, Gaza has become the graveyard of those promises. Entire neighborhoods have been obliterated. More than 65,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 2023, tens of thousands of them women and children. UN aid workers describe appalling, inhuman conditions: families digging loved ones from rubble, hospitals converted into mass graves, and civilians shot while searching for food. "This is not humanitarian failure, it is intentional starvation, a weapon of war, prohibited under international law, yet deployed in plain sight with the world watching," one UN worker wrote.[1]

The disconnect between the UN's ideals and its practice in Palestine is stark as UN personnel who speak truth to power face retaliation. In June 2025, Jonathan Whittall, a senior humanitarian official, described how starving civilians were being shot while trying to reach food, only to be informed that his visa in Israel would be revoked. Secretary-General António Guterres himself pointed out that the Security Council's paralysis over Gaza had damaged the credibility of the organization as a whole, exposing an outdated and unfair system of global security[2] that has been captured by the states that can yield their veto power.

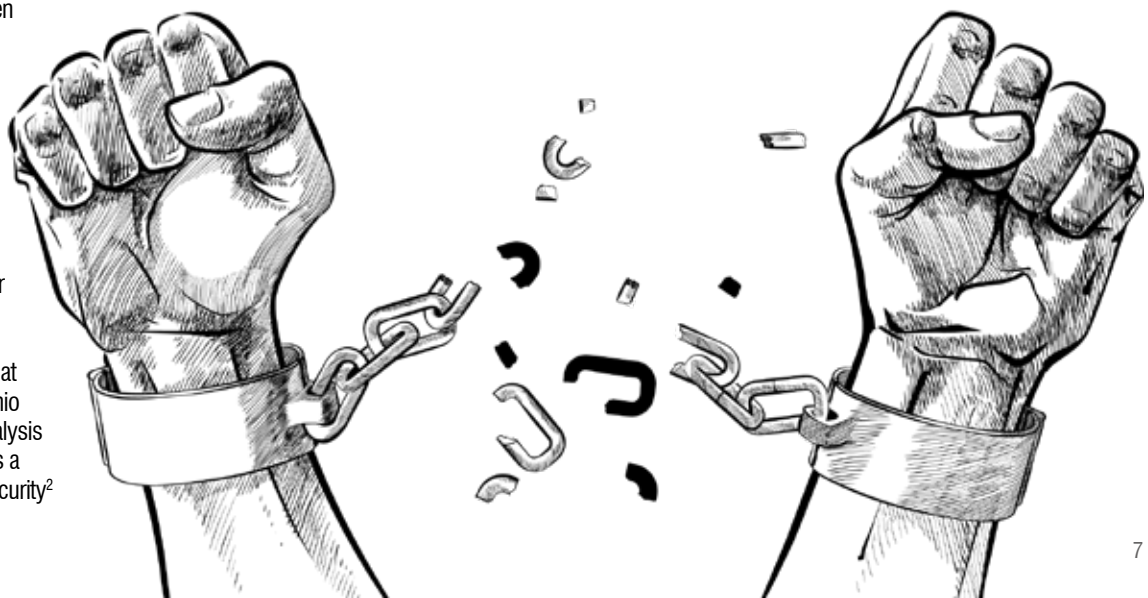
The UN's failures regarding Palestine date back to its very beginnings. In 1947, the General Assembly voted for the partition of the country, sparking war and the *Nakba* (lit. catastrophe), when in 1948 over 750,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled and hundreds of villages were destroyed. UN Resolution 194 promised their right of return – not a unique right but rather universally applicable to refugees and displaced people, enshrined in international law[3] – yet this principle has never been enforced in Palestine. The refugees of 1948 and their descendants remain scattered in exile, many still holding deeds and keys to homes they have never been allowed to see again.

Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN's first mediator in Palestine, advocated for refugee return and international protection for Jerusalem. For his commitment, he was assassinated in Jerusalem in 1948 by a Zionist militia. His murder set an ominous precedent: efforts to uphold Palestinian rights would be violently opposed, and often abandoned by the international community.

For Palestinians, the UN's ideals are abstract principles that have failed to deliver justice: broken promises and daily betrayals, written in rubble, starvation, and graves.

In 1949, the UN created the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to provide temporary relief. Yet seventy-five years later, UNRWA still serves 5.9 million refugees across Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Refugee camps have become permanent cities of exile. While UNRWA has been a lifeline – described by Guterres as "the backbone of humanitarian support to Gaza"[4] – its existence is also a symbol of the international community's failure to resolve the refugee question. The persistence of UNRWA underscores the contradiction at the heart of the UN's engagement: it has kept Palestinians alive, but it has not protected their rights or ended their dispossession.

The June 1967 Six-Day War was another turning point, when Israel's



occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem created what is now the longest military occupation in modern history. Security Council Resolution 242 called for withdrawal and affirmed the "inadmissibility of acquiring territory by war," but Israel has evaded compliance. Instead, it has moved its citizens as settlers into the occupied territory. Decade after decade, the Security Council has condemned Israeli settlements and declared them illegal. Resolution 465 in 1980 unanimously affirmed that settlements had "no legal validity." Yet there has been no enforcement.

Meanwhile, apartheid South Africa faced boycotts, embargoes, and eventual collapse under global pressure. The double standard was glaring: In South Africa a racist regime was dismantled, yet in Palestine, another racist system has become entrenched. For many in the Global South, this hypocrisy has been searing. In 1975, the General Assembly declared "Zionism is a form of racism," but under intense US pressure, that resolution was revoked in 1991. By then, Israel had deepened its occupation, fortified its settlement enterprise, and entrenched a system many now openly describe as apartheid.

The Oslo Accords of the 1990s promised a two-state solution but delivered entrenchment of the occupation instead, and again, the international community has failed to demand that Israel abide by its commitments. The Palestinian Authority was created, but without sovereignty. Discussions on the refugees' rights,

From the partition and the Nakba to today: Palestine's history is a history of abandonment.

the status of Jerusalem, and the question of how to deal with the illegal settlements were deferred. By the early 2000s, disillusionment over the lack of progress toward Palestinian statehood erupted in the Second Intifada. While the UN had endorsed Oslo, in 2002 it ceded diplomacy to the "Quartet," the four states tasked with overseeing the mediations in the so-called peace process even though their leanings were anything but impartial. Aid flowed to build Palestinian institutions, but settlements expanded at record pace and a separation wall was implemented, separating Palestinian communities and impeding Palestinian freedom of movement with significant impact on livelihoods and the economy. In 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled Israel's West Bank separation wall illegal and ordered its dismantlement, yet Israel has ignored the ruling; the wall has become permanent. Once again, the UN's moral authority was undermined by its inability to enforce its own legal framework.

Since 2007, Gaza has been under a blockade, with its 2.3 million residents confined in what UN officials and others have long called an open-air prison. Wars in 2008–09, 2012, 2014, and 2021 killed thousands. The UN dispatched fact-finding missions: the Goldstone Commission in 2009, inquiries in 2014, and an open-ended Commission of Inquiry in 2021. Each documented war crimes. Each urged accountability. Yet each was ignored or buried under political pressure.

The war waged since 2023 has been the deadliest. Following Hamas' attack of October 7 killed 1,200 Israelis, Israel has unleashed unprecedented bombardment. By mid-2025, more than 60,000 Palestinians were dead. UNICEF has reported thousands of children killed, UN Women has reported that two mothers have been dying every hour,[5] starving civilians have been shot dead in the hundreds as they approached food trucks, and CEDAW declared that when mothers in Gaza bury nearly 8,000 children in four months, "very basic principles are challenged."[6] While Israel claims to target fighters, civilians have been four-fifths of the casualties.

Moreover, the targeted destruction of civil institutions, media offices, even hospitals and churches has included UN institutions in Gaza – a war crime according to international law. UNRWA facilities have been bombed even though they were clearly marked, convoys have been obstructed, and over 200 UN staff have been killed. Whittall called Gaza "an insurmountable obstacle course of obstructionism."[7] Yet the Security Council, paralyzed by US vetoes, could not demand a ceasefire until 21 months into the war. The General Assembly stepped in, voting overwhelmingly for a humanitarian truce. Israel ignored it.

Warnings of genocide came swiftly. In November 2023, seven UN Special Rapporteurs declared Palestinians faced a "grave risk of genocide."[8] Some



The Oslo Accords provided no more than a mirage of peace

officials resigned, saying that genocide was unfolding "before our eyes"[9] yet they were unable to prevent any of it. Indeed, the killing goes on unimpeded even though 153 states have signed on to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

The ICJ delivered two critical interventions. In July 2024, its advisory opinion declared Israel's occupation unlawful and ordered its end "as rapidly as possible."[10] In a separate case brought by South Africa, the Court issued binding orders requiring Israel to prevent genocidal acts and allow humanitarian aid into the Strip. Israel has ignored both. The contrast with Ukraine is glaring. When Russia invaded, the UN and Western powers mobilized sanctions, weapons, and prosecutions. When Israel razed Gaza, those same powers armed it. International law, Palestinians noted, was only as strong as the politics behind it.

Feminist voices have sharpened the critique. Palestinian and Global South feminists asked: How can a feminism that cannot name genocide be feminism at all? UN Women has been criticized for focusing on menstrual kits while avoiding condemnation of mass killings. "What is genocide but patriarchy writ large – masculinity drunk on its power to dominate and obliterate?" wrote Mona Eltahawy.[11] For Gaza's women, bombs that collapsed maternity wards were not collateral damage, they were gender-based violence. A genuine feminism must confront militarism, apartheid, and colonialism as inseparable from women's oppression. This critique

has exposed a broader hypocrisy: Western institutions celebrate women's empowerment in principle but are silent when women and children are being slaughtered in Gaza. True intersectional feminism requires naming genocide, apartheid, and occupation as gendered violence.

The Global South and the global streets do not mirror the stance of Western governments. As Gaza burned, millions marched worldwide. In Johannesburg, Jakarta, London, New York, and beyond, people demanded a ceasefire and accountability. Angela Davis called Palestine "the moral litmus test for the world." For many activists, Palestinian liberation is inseparable from struggles against racism, climate injustice, and patriarchy. Global South leaders have echoed this sentiment. South Africa's government led the genocide case at the ICJ. Brazil, Ireland, Chile, and others demanded accountability. Across Latin America and Africa, governments drew parallels between their colonial histories and Palestine's plight. The message was clear: Palestine is not a marginal issue. It is a test of whether the international system truly values universality.

Palestinians often stress that they have been waiting their entire lives for the international community and its institutions to deliver justice. For them, the UN is an institution that provides aid but not protection, documents their suffering but cannot stop it. Yet history does not have to be fixed. The UN has three tools at its disposal that it rarely uses: The Uniting for Peace resolution could bypass Security Council paralysis; Israel's membership privileges could be suspended, as the UN did with apartheid South Africa; and the international community could enforce ICJ rulings through coordinated state action.

Above all, the UN must name the crimes: settler colonialism, apartheid, genocide. In the struggle against South Africa, the UN did not mince words. Why not now? Independent experts such as Francesca Albanese have described Israel's actions as genocide and colonial erasure. For her truth-telling, she was sanctioned by the United States. The message is chilling: clarity comes at a cost. Such efforts at silencing voices that call for justice must be confronted.

The path forward toward justice exists. It comprises accountability that can be achieved by supporting ICC investigations, imposing arms embargoes, and sanctioning war criminals. It furthermore should offer protection by deploying international observers or peacekeepers to shield civilians. Another important measure is inclusion that centers Palestinian voices, especially women, youth, and refugees, in all processes. And finally, it involves consistency: we must apply international law equally, whether in Ukraine or Gaza. These steps are not radical. They are already outlined in decades of UN reports. What has been missing is the political will to implement them.

The UN must also confront its own complicity and reimagine its role. Too often, its statements lament "tragic deaths" without naming perpetrators. This reduces massacres to natural disasters, stripping victims of dignity. For the UN to redeem itself, it must moreover confront the veto abuse, particularly by the United States, amplify Global South leadership, and integrate grassroots activism into diplomacy. Decolonizing the UN means centering refugees' rights, feminist perspectives, and civil society. It also means resisting donor pressure that muzzles agencies like UNRWA.

The South African struggle against apartheid shows the way: Sanctions, boycotts, truth-telling, and unwavering commitment to equality eventually dismantled a racist regime. Palestinians deserve no less. In 2023, UN experts warned, "A genocide is unfolding before our eyes, and the Security Council's paralysis is shameful. History will not forgive our failure."[12] The UN now stands at a crossroads. One path is the continuation of the status quo – issuing reports, adopting resolutions, and delivering more or less sufficient amounts of aid while Palestinians bleed – and the UN's credibility collapses. The other path is principled action: confronting impunity, enforcing international law, and recognizing Palestine's struggle as the last great anti-colonial cause.

If the UN cannot uphold universality in Gaza, universality itself collapses. If it can, even belatedly, it may redeem its founding promise. For Palestinians, justice delayed has been the story of generations. The question is whether justice will finally be delivered – or buried beneath Gaza's rubble.

Omar Da'na is an independent policy advocacy and human rights expert with over 20 years of experience in the Middle East and North Africa. He has led national, regional, and global advocacy initiatives and specializes in international law, human rights education, and humanitarian policy.

Gaza is the graveyard of international law. There are no systems of accountability in place, and the United States, as the strongest power worldwide, has wielded its veto at least 53 times to shield Israel from accountability, going as far as repeatedly blocking measures that called for a ceasefire.

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[1] Whittall, Jonathan, "I Saw Many Atrocities as a Senior Aid Official in Gaza. Now Israeli authorities are trying to silence us." Guardian, July 29, 2025. Whittall's firsthand account of humanitarian operations in Gaza and the retaliation he faced.

[2] "UN Head Slams Security Council for Failure to End Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine Wars," Al Jazeera, September 13, 2024.

[3] The right of return is based, among others, on the Article 13 of the 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. See also, "Human Rights Watch Policy on the Right of Return," no date.

[4] Guterres, António, "UN Secretary-General interview with Al Jazeera on Security Council Failures and Impunity," September 13, 2024.

[5] UNICEF, Gaza Has Become a Graveyard for Thousands of Children – UNICEF warns of a "lost generation," press release, February 2024.

[6] UN Women, Two Mothers Are Killed in Gaza Every Hour, press release, January 2024.

[7] Whittall, Jonathan, I Saw Many Atrocities as a Senior Aid Official in Gaza, Guardian, July 29, 2025.

[8] OHCHR, "UN Experts Warn of Grave Risk of Genocide in Gaza," Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 16, 2023.

[9] UN OHCHR/UN Experts, "'A Genocide Is Unfolding Before Our Eyes,' – UN Experts Warn, Some Resign in Protest over Gaza Crisis, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 2023.

[10] International Court of Justice, "Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem," ICJ, The Hague, July 19, 2024.

[11] UN Women, "Two Mothers Are Killed in Gaza Every Hour," press release, January 2024, Mona Eltahawy, "Feminism vs. Genocide," Feminist Giant, 2024.

[12] OHCHR, UN Experts Warn: "A Genocide Is Unfolding Before Our Eyes" – Security Council Paralysis Is Shameful, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 16, 2023.



Colonial Thuggery and Bias Are Alive and Well in Palestine

Two Important Cases Witnessed in September 2025



By Rami G. Khouri

Two significant developments that took place in September this year should remind us that in the Israeli-American assault on Gaza and Palestine we are witnessing a reformulated version of the European colonialism that has plagued the Middle East and much of the Global South for the last four centuries: Western states' recognition of Palestine and the September 29 announcement of the Gaza "peace plan" by President Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu. While they both contain some positive elements, they are overwhelmingly defined by colonial thuggery, the dynamics that have defined almost every aspect of Zionist-Israeli-Western policies on Palestine over the past century.

In principle, it is a good thing for states to recognize Palestine, as over 147 states (out of the world's 193) had done by the past summer, most of them from the Global South. While the September announcements of recognizing Palestine – made by Great Britain, France, Canada, Australia, and a few others – are mostly symbolic moves, they nevertheless carry some legal implications that one day might prove useful for Palestine's quest for self-determination and actual statehood. Under the current global conditions, however, legal attributes and rights have turned out to be mostly meaningless. The Zionist-Israeli-American assault on the global rule of law, adopted post-WWII, has reactivated the colonial-era rule that "might is right."

Colonialism's basic operating system comprises three main dimensions that over recent centuries manifested in various manners across the world. Today, all of them are applied simultaneously in Zionist-Israeli-US policies: First, White/Western people, societies, and states across the Global North still hold the assumption that they intrinsically possess greater human capabilities and more righteous values, and therefore enjoy greater rights, than the darker people of the Global South. Second, Western colonial powers assume that they have the total freedom to act anywhere across the globe, at any time, and in any manner they deem necessary to increase their wealth, security, and power. This includes the right to use massive military force, impose systems of slavery and subjugation, and reorganize the territories, economies, and demographics of societies that they have colonized and continue to exploit in the South. Third, the colonized people of the South are considered invisible, possessing no rights, no human agency,

Colonial exploitation was officially repudiated in the 1960 UN Resolution on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, yet the perpetuation and reemergence of colonialism's main dimensions have become glaringly obvious in the context of the world's policies applied in "dealing" with the "conflict" in Gaza: the assumed superiority of Western peoples and countries and their subsequent "right" to impose conditions on peoples of color that remain invisible and largely absent in decision-making regarding their future.

British colonization of Palestine.



and no voice; they therefore can be ignored while the colonizers go about reorganizing and plundering their lands and resources.

All three of these dynamics were evident in the suffering that Palestinians endured between circa 1910 and 1960 under the assault of the Zionists-UK forces. Since the 1960s, they have been perpetuated under the ongoing assault by Israel and the United States that have for the most part acted in accord. The current genocide in Gaza is merely the most dramatic and vicious stage of this colonial assault on the Palestinians that started with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, when the UK government approved the Zionist plan to create a Jewish "home" and state in Palestine at a time when 93 percent of the population comprised Indigenous Palestinian Arabs – and the United Kingdom did not yet control the land in question. This combination of Zionist audacity and racism with British imperial arrogance and violence launched the harsh century of Palestinian suffering that continues to this day.

It seems evident now, why majorities of people across the South and large numbers of younger people across the Global North are mobilizing for Palestinian justice and calling for equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians. They do so because the savagery and continuity in the abuse of Palestinians by Israel and Western powers has exposed the continuing nature of the global colonial enterprise that most of the world had assumed had ended during the global decolonization period in the mid-twentieth century. It has become clear that Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, and a few other Western countries have not only actively participated in the genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere, these countries also worked together to perpetuate the colonial negation of the Palestinian people's rights, humanity, voice, and agency – which has extended beyond the land of Palestine and into the Western democracies of the North.

In the United States, Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, France, and other lands, formal official efforts have been made, driven by Zionist-Israeli initiatives, to make the Palestinians an invisible colonized people. If voices for Palestinian justice across the North could not be silenced, the next option was to criminalize them. The colonial methods that for centuries had treated the Indigenous peoples of the South as invisible and dispensable beings were now being used in the democratic North: Peaceful activists and advocates for Palestine justice lost their jobs, were denied public speaking and gathering opportunities, and accused of antisemitism, terrorism, and hate crimes. Some countries, particularly Germany, the United States, and Britain, have arrested peaceful protestors and taken them to court over their expression of support for the rights of the Palestinians to statehood and their opposition to the war crimes Israel is committing.

British army in Palestine.



When this oppression became clear in the months and years after October 2023, when the extent and savagery of the US-enabled genocide against Palestine became known, most of the world recognized that the brutality in Gaza and the West Bank revived images of the colonial atrocities and massacres that the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and a few others had perpetrated across the Global South during the previous four centuries. The world saw colonial savagery being applied today in Palestine – and it instantly recognized the long-standing resistance of the Palestinian people as the globe's last major anti-colonial struggle.

Like in all anti-colonial struggles, the weaker Indigenous people of the South suffered disproportionate deaths, injury, and destruction in the face of the war machines and killer mindsets of the Northern colonialists. Yet the battle for justice and national rights in Palestine has persisted – in every dimension of life, including street demonstrations, university sit-ins and encampments, peaceful societal disruptions, at sports and cultural events, in court cases, throughout social media, in all available international organizations and global courts such as the ICC and ICJ, and elsewhere.

This realization culminated at one level last month in the half dozen recognitions of the State of Palestine by Western powers who had previously hesitated to call the destruction of Gaza a genocide, even when it had been denoted as such by most international human rights groups and genocide scholars. This late recognition of Palestine's statehood seems motivated largely by these Western states' desire to assuage their own guilt over not having done anything to stop the genocide since October 2023 – let alone not having done anything to stop the colonization of the occupied Palestinian lands since 1967. If these countries were serious about Palestinian statehood, they should not only have recognized Palestine decades ago, they should also follow up their words with concrete action to bring about a real change for Palestinians.

The symbolism of the United Kingdom, the predominant pre-WWII imperial power, handing off the baton of colonial control in Palestine to the United States after WWII is an important sign of colonialism's continuous abuse of Palestine and other Arab lands over the past century.

In reality, these recent recognitions do not generate any significant tangible and positive impact. They could even be a negative force in the sense that they form one element in the rejuvenated but disguised neocolonialism that these Western powers are perpetrating. While it appears a positive development to recognize the Palestinian state, it might just serve to cover up the fact that nothing is done about the atrocities Israel has been committing in Palestine with the tacit approval, quiet support, or active



Colonial forces in Syria.

complicity of the United States and some Western powers, not only during this genocide but also over the last 50 years – and not only in Palestine but all over the Middle East.

The Palestinian right to self-determination and an independent state is deeply anchored in dozens of UN resolutions, many of which these countries voted for. So what we need now is serious action by Western powers to show that they genuinely mean what they say. When they say that the Palestinians should have a state, it follows that Israeli Zionism should be contained. Apartheid, occupation, ethnic cleansing, colonization, mass murder, incarceration, and genocidal policies must be stopped. Indeed, states that support Palestinian statehood could do many things to force that to happen. They could end Israeli colonial control through measures that include embargoes and sanctions, they could send protection forces, suspend Israel's UN membership, or do the kinds of things that many in the West did against apartheid South Africa.

Yet despite Britain's recognition of a Palestinian state, the group Palestine Action has been criminalized as terrorism for actively engaging to disrupt the British arms industry that is supplying weapons and ammunition to Israel, as has any peaceful expression of support for this group. So, a juxtaposition of Britain's policies against its statement that the Palestinians should have a state suggests that this recognition is a neither serious nor sincere gesture by the concerned political leaders. The situation is similar in France and Belgium, which have recognized a Palestinian state yet crack down heavily on popular expressions of support. We should call these governments out on this contradiction, and push them to go well beyond the statement of recognition with practical action to show that they are serious. Countries such as Spain and Ireland are leading among those who are willing to support their words with action, letting Israel know that they are serious in their demands for an end to the genocide and to the violation of the Palestinian right to self-determination and statehood.

The ugly reality is that the Western world has over the last century of the conflict between Zionism and the Indigenous Palestinian population supported in practice what the Israelis have done, partly prompted by guilt over the Nazi Holocaust and genocide, partly for other political and electoral reasons, and largely, in my assessment, because these countries have remained colonial countries at heart. They do not believe that the Indigenous people of Palestine, or of many other parts of the world, have the same rights as the White colonial people of the North. Deep in their political genes, these countries (many if not most of which have a colonial past) stand in practice with Israel and Zionism, the last major and active settler-colonial enterprise in the world; these countries have recognized Palestinian rights only through words to date.

Some Western governments' recognition of Palestinian statehood includes a clear and explicit patronizing sentiment: the UK that said that it would recognize Palestine only if Israel does not stop the genocide, whereas France recognizes only a demilitarized Palestinian state that would not have any self-defense ability. Such colonial conditioning is clear: A Palestinian state is recognized not because the Palestinians have a right to it but only within conditions that serve these governments' political and electoral interests. They do not grant Israelis and Palestinians equal rights, whether by constitutionalism, modern liberal political values, UN decisions, or other means.

These equal rights need to be implemented simultaneously, not sequentially. For the past 75 years, the process has been that Palestinians and Arabs may be granted their rights only if they comply with Israel's demands first. This is another form of colonialism. We are possibly at a very important moment in modern world history: Will we clarify that colonialism has ended once and for all? Exactly what do "Western liberal democracies" really stand for? Will the deeply engrained Western colonial heritage simply be garnished with new public relations gimmickry that allows Western politicians to avoid being voted out of office by their citizenries while they pretend that they are doing something concrete for Palestinians after a century of ignoring or dehumanizing them?

The recognition of Palestine without further action to improve conditions for Palestinians on the ground remains a largely hollow, if dramatic and media-genic gesture.

The most significant new global development in this context is that most people in most Western countries want an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and are beginning to exert some pressure on their governments to end the Israeli genocide. Yet most governments do not follow these sentiments of their own citizens, which is why hundreds of thousands who are seeking Palestinian justice are taking to the streets all over the world, including in the West.

Sadly, at this critical junction, we just witnessed the US president and the Israeli prime minister announce a so-called "peace plan" for Gaza that, as they claim, aims at ending the genocide and bringing long-term peace to the region. But a closer look at the 20-point US proposal suggests that it is in fact a continuation of the colonial ways, merely in more sophisticated disguises. The total absence of Palestinians in shaping the proposal is one of its main problems, which falls in line with the colonial rule that denies agency to Indigenous people in the South while the White northern colonialists set the rules. If the Palestinians do not accept the proposal, the US threatens to actively support a continuation of the Israeli genocide. The proposal treats the Palestinians like truant adolescents who have to be watched over by adults who help them "de-radicalize" so they can develop their

society. All focus regarding security is the security of Israel, with White Western adult supervision and armed forces from abroad in Palestine, mainly to make sure that no new resistance arises to Zionist-Israel barbarism. The United States and colonial sidekicks such as Tony Blair will sit at the top of the governance supervision system, because in colonial rules the locals cannot run their own societies. The proposal also says nothing about Israeli reparations for the massive destruction it has caused over the last two years (or the years preceding this most recent war). Palestinian self-determination and statehood are barely mentioned, and only like far-off wonderland mirages to which people can aspire in their dreams, or a Disney movie.

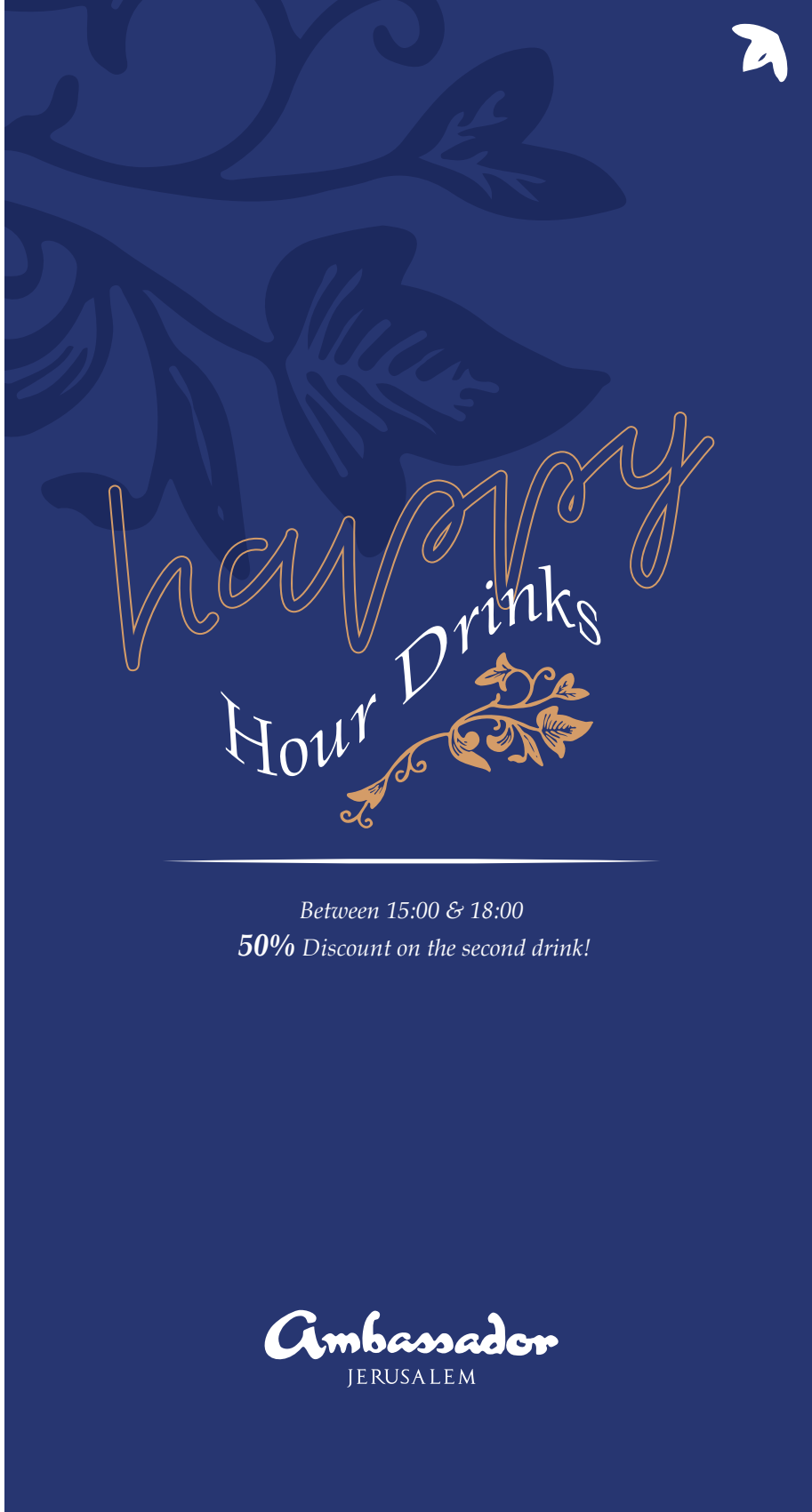
A small but telling point from the Trump-Netanyahu press conference on Monday was their repeated reference to the "Abrahamic" accords, which Trump called "Abrahamic" and Netanyahu, following the Hebrew pronunciation, called "Avrahamic." Nowhere in the proposal or in their colonial psyches did they consider using a linguistic reference that reflects the Arabic-speaking and Islamic pronunciation of the "Prophet Ibrahim." For in their minds, the Palestinians and their many Arab-Islamic supporters do not count for much; they are merely the recipients of Western military assaults and political dictates. In the colonial world, only the psychological and linguistic frames of the ., northern, settler-colonial armies applies.

I could go on and on about every point in the proposal, but hundreds of my colleagues around the world are doing that this week. I will only add that this US-Israeli proposal, with its associated threats of more American-Israeli savagery in Palestine, should be a case study for young students around the world who wish to understand how the colonial era happened long ago. It is rare that we get the chance to watch historical dynamics from the past occur before our eyes in the present. This is one such opportunity, and it explains largely why a ceasefire and exchange of hostages/prisoners was not concluded over a year ago, when reasonable terms for it were offered that acknowledged the rights and demands of both sides – unlike this proposal which centers on Israeli and Western colonial perspectives and values.

Nowhere in the text of the proposal or in the words and body language of Trump and Netanyahu is there any hint that they feel that Israelis and Palestinians should enjoy equal rights, being granted simultaneously. This is no surprise, alas, because we are still living in the global colonial era. Netanyahu himself spelled this out when he said, as he often does, that he fights for the well-being of the enlightened Western civilization against the threats of barbarism from the South.

Rami G. Khouri, a Palestinian-American from Nazareth whose family resides in Amman, Nazareth, New York, and Cambridge, MA, USA, has been a journalist, author, and analyst in the Middle East and the USA for the past 60 years. He is working on books about the craft and legacy of the journalist Anthony Shadid, the 200 top antiquities sites in Jordan, and the modern colonial legacy that continues to define governance and diplomacy in the Middle East. His work is available for free at his Substack site.

SCAN
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When Losing Hope for Justice in Palestine Is Not an Option!



By Diana Alzeer

In early September 2025, the US administration announced sanctions against three prominent Palestinian human rights organizations: Al-Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), under Executive Order 14203, which targets the International Criminal Court (ICC) and engagements with the court.

The same sanctions have been used against ICC officials, judges, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Francesca Albanese. The intention of this order is to cripple accountability efforts for Palestinian victims at the ICC and ultimately to undermine their advocacy, which amplifies the experiences of Palestinians as they endure one of the darkest chapters in history, with a raging and ongoing genocide in Gaza, alongside other crimes, including starvation, collective punishment, apartheid, forced displacement, torture, and sexual- and gender-based violence.

In the context of the three organizations, these sanctions not only try to cripple the work they do with the ICC but also disrupt all their operations, given the financial constraints stemming from such an alarming escalation against human rights advocacy for the Palestinian people. This further jeopardizes the work of the court, accountability mechanism, and the human rights movement and will have wider implications, creating a chilling effect on the global fight against impunity and the defense of human rights.

AL-HAQ

This move marks a serious escalation in efforts to shield Israel from accountability for its ongoing genocide and for other atrocities in Gaza and against the Palestinian people. These sanctions are more than political posturing; they form part of a coordinated campaign of genocide denial and an attack on the very foundations of international justice.

Over the past 22 months, Israel's genocidal campaign and relentless attacks on homes, schools, hospitals, and all elements of life in Gaza have resulted in the killing of at least 65,000 Palestinians directly by shootings or Israeli bombardments, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. However, real estimates indicate a much higher

Actions for justice in Palestine will be smeared and even criminalized. What matters is that we, as a global movement, resist the culture of fear and stay true to our principles against all forms of oppression. Divide and rule tactics are already at play, but unity is essential to preserve our shared humanity. If we allow the powerful to isolate and break us, rebuilding could take generations. We owe it to other struggles and to future generations.

Lady Justice crying while walking through Gaza's rubble. Artwork created by Giorgia Savino.



Support Statements

"UN experts dismayed by US sanctions against Palestinian human rights organizations."
https://www.ohchr.org/

"US sanctions against Palestinian NGOs a blatant attack on human rights."
https://www.amnesty.org/

"ACIJ condemns US sanctions on Palestinian human rights organizations supporting the ICC."
https://acij.org.au/

"US uses UCC sanctions against three leading Palestinian rights groups."
https://www.hrw.org/

"US government's sanctions against Palestinian human rights organizations are indefensible."
https://www.accountabilitycounsel.org/

"Defending justice against intimidation: The Coalition for the ICC condemns shameful sanctions against Palestinian human rights organizations."
https://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/

"Solidarity statement with Palestinian organizations in the face of Israel's genocide."
https://ishr.ch/latest-updates

"Statement from Just Peace Advocates, ICJP Canada, Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (ACLA), and Canadian Lawyers for International Human Rights (CLAIHR)."
https://www.instagram.com/p/DOYmLgbDzam/

number, with thousands of people missing or trapped under the rubble. The death toll of the Ministry of Health doesn't account for the deaths caused by lack of humanitarian access, lack of health care, and other indirect deaths resulting from this ongoing genocide.

According to the *Lancet* the actual death toll is 40 percent higher than the figures reported by the Ministry of Health. Another report, authored by Professor Richard Hil and Dr. Gideon Polya, published by Middle East Monitor via Instagram, and titled "Skewering History: The Odious Politics of Counting Gaza's Dead," estimates that as of September 3, 2025, around 680,000 people have been killed during the genocide in Gaza, with an estimated 380,000 children among this number.

Entire neighborhoods have been destroyed, medical infrastructure is devastated, and the conditions for civilian life have been rendered impossible. Legal experts, UN officials, and prominent human rights organizations have warned that Israel's actions amount to genocide. On September 16, 2025, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

Yet the response from Israel's allies, especially the United States and some European capitals, has been not only to deny these crimes but also to actively undermine efforts to investigate and address them. Sanctioning Palestinian organizations that have presented evidence to international legal bodies is a proactive attempt to silence truth-telling and suppress the demand for justice.

This is how genocide denial operates in practice. It is not only the refusal to acknowledge atrocities; it is a calculated effort to silence those who do, while continuing to shield Israeli perpetrators and providing Israel with weapons and political support. Ultimately, this makes the United States and others complicit in the genocide in Gaza and in the other international crimes committed against the Palestinian people.

Palestinian civil society has long been targeted. For decades, Israel has systematically harassed, delegitimized, arrested, and dismantled Palestinian human rights defenders. In 2021, six prominent human rights and civil society organizations were unlawfully criminalized by Israel. The United States also sanctioned Addameer Prisoner Rights and Human Rights Association earlier this year under a different executive order.

These organizations were targeted because of their essential work in documenting ongoing violations against Palestinians and sustaining communities. The very efforts that preserved the resilience of the people on the ground and sought accountability were the reason behind the designations. The organizations were labelled "terrorist organizations" based on secret and unsubstantiated evidence. These labels were widely condemned by the UN, EU states, and some US officials. Yet beyond condemnations, states applied little pressure on Israel to end this unlawful criminalization, just as they continue to do very little to stop Israel's ongoing crimes and genocide against the Palestinian people.

By adopting Israel's approach, the United States has taken the smearing and intimidation campaign to the global stage. The sanctions against these Palestinian groups are not only about Gaza; they are a warning that anyone who challenges Israel will be targeted, even when using lawful, internationally recognized channels for accountability and advocacy.

The danger of this approach extends beyond Palestine. Targeting civil society organizations, especially those engaged with international legal systems, sets a global precedent. If legal advocacy is recast as a threat to "national security," accountability itself becomes a crime. This presents a dangerous precedent for human rights work and victims worldwide. It further isolates and divides the global human rights movement, as each organization anywhere will start to weigh the risks of engaging with Palestinian organizations and/or the ICC or be more reluctant to carry out advocacy that challenges violations in relation to Palestine and other contexts and situations around the world.

While states officials are doing very little for justice, people are stepping forward. Around the world, a diverse, decentralized movement for Palestinian rights continues to grow in strength and clarity. Far from

being silenced, ordinary people are making their voices heard in courtrooms, classrooms, ports, streets, and online. Powerful actions are coming to the forefront, primarily from grassroots and decentralized groups and from those less dependent on foreign or US funding.

The Global Sumud Flotilla, for example, represents one of the boldest expressions of grassroots resistance to the blockade on Gaza. This civilian-led mission breaks through physical and symbolic barriers, asserting that collective punishment and enforced isolation must be confronted with collective courage. The Global Sumud Flotilla is the largest in-sea action for justice, with more than 50 vessels sailing to Gaza to break the blockade and provide humanitarian aid. Both Italy and Spain have formally announced that they are deploying naval vessels to assist and protect the flotilla and their citizens on board.

In the cultural sphere, Ms. Rachel, a children's educator with a global following, used her platform to speak openly about the trauma experienced by Palestinian children from Gaza, breaking through the deliberate desensitization and dehumanization that often reduces Palestinian suffering to distant statistics.

Art has also become a space of power and resonance. The film *Voice of Hind*, which centers Palestinian voices with striking intimacy, received a record-breaking ovation at the Venice Film Festival premiere in early September 2025. More and more artists and public figures are speaking out, and their voices are loud and unapologetic, and that is what we need.

Student movements have ignited across university campuses worldwide. Their encampments have become powerful spaces of protest and education, reminding academic institutions and the wider public that neutrality in the face of injustice is complicity.

Workers and trade unions have also played an increasingly vital role this year. In Italy, dockworkers blocked arms shipments sent to Israel. In France, port workers refused to load military equipment destined for Israel. In Belgium, union coalitions pressed members not to handle weapons and demanded an embargo. In Spain, the government has now made a total arms embargo official, banning the export and purchase of weapons with Israel, and prohibiting ships and aircraft carrying arms or fuel from docking in Spanish ports or using Spanish airspace in order to pressure Israel over the genocide in Gaza. These actions were not symbolic; they materially disrupted the systems sending supplies that sustain Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people.

Unions, historically critical in anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles, are once again stepping into their role as global actors for justice. They remind us that labor is not just an economic force; it is a moral one. By siding with the Palestinian people, these workers reinforce the principle that accountability begins at home, with the refusal to be complicit. The international legal system and its institutions, such as the International Criminal Court, UN human rights mechanisms, and the Geneva Conventions, were created not to serve power but to restrain it. Their purpose is to protect the vulnerable, prevent mass atrocity, and ensure redress when crimes are committed.

Yet powerful states that selectively undermine these systems by protecting allies, attacking accountability efforts, and punishing those who turn to law do more than fail in their duties. They actively erode the very structures that uphold our shared humanity.

This erosion is already visible. Legal advocates now face personal and professional risks. Funding streams for human rights groups are under threat. International courts are increasingly reluctant to act decisively. Meanwhile, perpetrators of atrocity crimes are emboldened by the knowledge that their impunity is being preserved at the highest levels.

We cannot afford to allow these systems to collapse. They may be imperfect, but they remain our best tools for addressing injustice globally. To protect them, we must protect those who use them, especially when under attack.

The consequences of this moment are not limited to Palestine. If the targeting of Al-Haq, Al Mezan, and PCHR is allowed to stand, it will reverberate in every region where people rely on international law for protection. From Sudan to Myanmar, Ukraine to Colombia, communities seeking justice for mass violence will find legal avenues increasingly closed.

This struggle cannot be seen as a "Palestinian issue" alone. It is a test of whether international law still holds power in the face of state violence. It measures whether human rights and legal systems are applied equally to all humans or only to those recognized by powerful states. For those of us working in this field, and those who still believe that these systems can offer hope, all human beings are equal and entitled to the same rights, protection, and access to justice. We are working on the principle that the universality of rights is essential for humanity as a whole. Yet we are at a crossroads, a moment for states, institutions, and citizens alike to decide which side of history they are on.

Despite the ongoing repression faced by Palestinian human rights defenders, the fight for justice continues. In our ongoing struggle against Israel's settler-colonial apartheid, losing hope during an ongoing genocide and the erasure of Palestinians is not an option. While censorship and repression grow against movements worldwide, voices of solidarity are growing louder. People around the world are choosing to act, refusing complicity, demanding justice, and insisting that international law must apply to all.

This moment is not just about Gaza and Palestine. It is about whether the world will protect the fragile but essential architecture of justice built after the ruins of World War II. It is about whether global citizens, through unions, art, education, protest, and direct action, can hold the line when governments fail to act in accordance with their obligations.

To stand with Palestine today is not only to confront unlawful occupation, apartheid, or genocide. It is to affirm that all lives have equal worth, that law should restrain violence, and that justice, however long denied, is possible.

This is our collective responsibility.

Diana Alzeer is a human rights defender and communications professional with extensive experience in Palestinian and international civil society and human rights organizations. She has worked closely with the broader human rights movement, both globally and within the Palestinian context, including leading strategic outreach and communications at Al-Haq, one of Palestine's leading human rights organizations. Holding a BA in journalism and sociology and an MA in political science and international relations, Diana is a feminist and advocate for justice from Palestine. She is also the mother of a two-year-old, Neel, who inspires her daily and embodies her hope for a better future.

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A Live Snapshot from the Sea

Reflections from an International Lawyer on Board the Flotilla



By Alexis Deswaef

As an international lawyer, I embarked on the Global Sumud Flotilla in Barcelona on August 31, 2025, because urgent action is needed to stop the genocide in Gaza. Our European governments and the European Union – which have the means to act – are doing absolutely nothing or not enough. This international citizens' initiative is a response to the inaction of our governments in the face of a genocide that is being live-streamed on our mobile phones, the famine orchestrated by the Israeli occupying army, and the ongoing ethnic cleansing happening before our eyes in Gaza.

The goal of the flotilla is to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza so that international humanitarian aid can finally get in. We tried by land via Egypt in June with the Global March to Gaza, but we were stopped at the Suez Canal. Some countries, including my own, Belgium, tried to drop aid and food by air with parachutes, but that was completely insufficient and even dangerous.

Now we're trying to gain access by sea. And our governments will have no choice but to support us and say to the genocidal Israeli government: "Do not touch our citizens who are bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza in a legal and completely peaceful manner!" If our governments take a strong stand with the Israeli government, as they must do, the flotilla will succeed and open a maritime humanitarian corridor.

This global flotilla brings together nearly 50 boats and more than 300 activists from 44 countries. The size of the Global Sumud Flotilla might make a difference compared to previous Freedom Flotillas, such as the Madleen and the Handala this year, which were illegally stopped by the Israeli army in international waters and their participants arrested, detained in Israel, and finally expelled. Here, we hope to succeed by arriving in Gaza to deliver all the humanitarian aid we are carrying and to establish the humanitarian corridor so that all international humanitarian aid can finally enter Gaza.

As a lawyer on the list of councils at the International Criminal Court in the Hague (ICC) and vice president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), I strongly believe that the defense of human rights must be carried out not only behind closed doors or in national or international assemblies but also on the ground, with the people who fight for their fundamental rights. It will take a long time for justice to overcome the total impunity of the Israeli perpetrators, and all the while the Palestinians in Gaza are facing a dramatic situation of absolute humanitarian emergency. This is the purpose of the Global Sumud Flotilla, even though there should be no need for such action! Indeed, this would not be necessary if our governments were to comply with their international legal obligations, for example, by implementing the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United Nations on December 9, 1948, which places an obligation on State parties to act to prevent a genocide and to stop the perpetrators of a genocide.

Organizing this extraordinary flotilla in just a few weeks, mobilizing a large number

A general assembly of the flotilla participants in Bizerte.

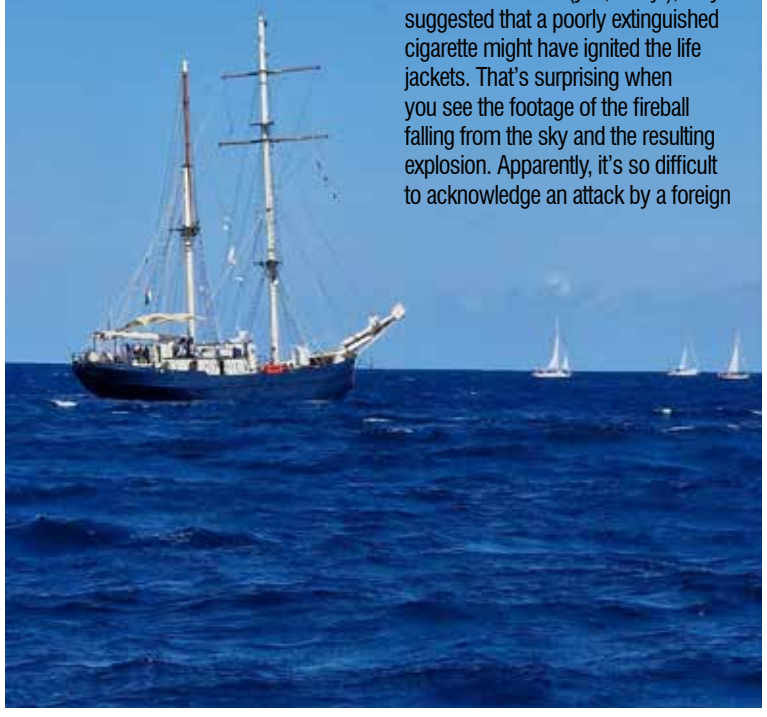


of volunteer participants, was an organizational challenge. Successfully setting sail from the port of Barcelona was therefore already a remarkable achievement. Why depart from so far away? Because Barcelona is a city that supports the Palestinian cause and could guarantee our departure – something that wasn't certain in other Mediterranean ports.

From Barcelona, we headed for Tunis, another friendly port.

Our sailboat, the Jeannot III (which we'd love to rename Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, Ahed Tamimi, or Marwan Barghouti), is slower than the motorboats such as the Family or the Alma, our two main boats. So, along with the other sailboats, we missed the welcoming event in Tunis on Sunday, September 4, arriving in the middle of the night.

The stopover in Tunis was useful for boat repairs, resupply, and in-person crew meetings. (I'm the "organizer" on my boat, the link to the steering committee, with whom we meet every morning from our respective boats.)



And then, there were the beautiful encounters – like meeting again with the Queen of Queens, Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories. She came to show her support for the flotilla and, in a powerful speech, reminded the world that international law is on our side.

The boats were anchored off the coast of Sidi Bou Said (Tunis). During the second night, the Family (the main boat) was attacked by a drone that dropped an incendiary bomb. Fortunately, those on board managed to put out the fire, and the damage was minor. But it could have been fatal.

Tunisian authorities have opened an investigation. After dumping the bomb debris into the sea (yes, really!), they suggested that a poorly extinguished cigarette might have ignited the life jackets. That's surprising when you see the footage of the fireball falling from the sky and the resulting explosion. Apparently, it's so difficult to acknowledge an attack by a foreign force on your own soil that the narrative shifted on social media: a clumsy participant allegedly misfired a flare that fell back onto the boat.

The following night, there was another attack – this time on the Alma (another large motorboat). The theory of a clumsy participant playing with flares became harder to defend. Yet, a journalist from a foreign media outlet still asked me the question, as if refusing to accept the facts: Is Israel (or a "friendly" proxy) carrying out attacks on the Flotilla already in Tunisia, so far from Gaza?

Within the Flotilla, we saw this attack as a warning, "testing the waters." First, testing the Flotilla: How will they react? Will they stop? Are they prepared? I can tell you, it only strengthened the Flotilla's resolve. Secondly, they're also testing our governments: How will the governments of these 44 nationalities respond to this first attack? I can tell you: Our governments failed the test – either by not reacting at all, or by issuing weak, hesitant responses. Or perhaps they passed the test from the Israeli perspective, who must have noted with surprise – and pleasure – the cowardly passivity of our political leaders.

The following night, I was on watch duty on our boat. Would there be a third consecutive attack? Police and army boats were patrolling among ours, armed with anti-drone bazookas – an impressive setup to fight off cigarettes and flares. The next day, we were asked to leave: Drone attacks just 1.5 kilometers away from the Tunisian president's residence were starting to become a bit embarrassing.

On we sailed to Bizerte, a seven-hour journey that turned into 14 because we were heading directly into the wind. Leaning at a 45° angle in rough seas, the sailing got intense. The result: a backed-up toilet and a flooded bilge. We had to bail water manually.



The auhor with Francesca Albanese.

As we were falling behind schedule, we, like the rest of the world, saw the images from Gaza on our phones. Gaza City "evacuated" and flattened. The last remaining large civilian buildings were bombed, including the headquarters of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), one of our two FIDH Member Organizations in Gaza (the other is Al Mezan).

On top of that, PCHR and Al Mezan have been hit with US sanctions – just like Al-Haq, our FIDH member organization in Ramallah – as part of a new misuse of anti-terror laws that are being used to silence human rights organizations. All this, under the complicit silence of Europe. What a shame!

Meanwhile, fascist Israeli Minister of Security Ben Gvir announced that all members of the Global Sumud Flotilla would be imprisoned as terrorists, under extremely harsh conditions in Tekziot prison (for men) and Damon prison

(for women), two of Israel's worst prisons. And even that threat received no reaction from our governments, who are supposed to protect us – especially given that we're doing nothing illegal. Indeed, bringing humanitarian aid to a population in desperate need is protected under international law and the law of the sea. Our mission is civilian and nonviolent. There is therefore no reason to attack us.

Now, we've left Sicily, where boats from Italy joined us. We are the Flotilla – a beautiful flotilla, the biggest in history that tried to break the siege of Gaza. Seeing all these boats together at sea, heading for Gaza, is deeply moving.

With the boats from Barcelona and Tunis, the Italian boats, and more boats joining us from Greece, we will be 40, maybe even 50 boats, all carrying humanitarian aid. Heading for Gaza!

The goal remains at the heart of our commitment: breaking the illegal blockade of Gaza, delivering the humanitarian aid we're carrying, and opening a maritime humanitarian corridor. In short, doing what our governments should have done a long time ago.

Yalla!

Article photos provided by the author from the Global Sumud Flotilla.

Alexis Deswaef is a lawyer in Brussels and at the International Criminal Court. In 2012, he participated in a first legal mission to Palestine. He published a book about it and returned to Gaza in 2017, 2022, 2023, and 2025. He is also vice president of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH www.fidh.org). For more information, please visit www.quartierdeslibertes.be.

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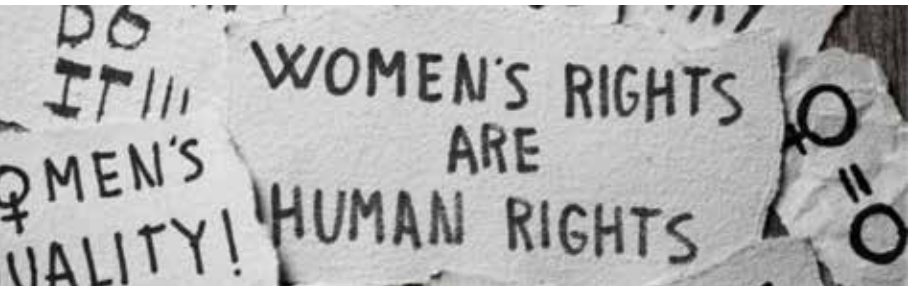


"Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire."

Learn more about how Anera's Gaza staff are saving lives and serving their communities – and how you can help:

anera.org/response-log





From Rhetoric to Reality

Feminist Frameworks for Justice in Palestine



By Dalal Iriqat

When the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 in 2000, it renewed its commitment to placing women at the forefront of peace and security. It recognized women not only as victims of conflict but also as essential agents of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Twenty-five years on, there is no place where the disparity between rhetoric and reality is more evident than in Palestine.

The Gaza genocide, humanitarian protection breakdown in the West Bank, and Israel's impunity reveal a harsh reality: the United Nation's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has failed Palestinian women. As global leaders still talk about women's empowerment, Palestinian women are living displacement, starvation, and violence while holding families and communities together. Their leadership is invisible, their rights are unprotected, and their dignity is bartered at the altar of geopolitics

The Gaza crisis has a very human face, and it is mostly that of women. Women and children have made up more than 70 percent of those killed or injured since October 2023 – a contrast with previous wars when men were the majority of victims.[1] This indicates that women are no longer collateral damage; women have been deliberately placed in the line of fire in a conflict that militarizes displacement, starvation, and family destruction. Take the story of six-year-old Hind Rajab, whose desperate final phone call pleading to be rescued after her family had been massacred in their car became a searing symbol of innocence crushed by systematic violence. Or the tragic example of Dr. Alaa al-Najjar, a pediatrician who saw that nine of her ten children – including her baby daughter – had been killed in an Israeli air raid on Khan Younis while she was at work trying to save the lives of other children. In spite of this incalculable loss, she still practices medicine, a testament to resilience in the face of sorrow.[2]

Other women have converted their despair into collective empowerment. Hanady Lulu, who lost her entire family, pulled herself and her only surviving child from the rubble to create the Samir Foundation that provides medical and mental healthcare to thousands. Meanwhile, voices like that of Hiba Zayyan, forcibly displaced to Egypt, have continued to advocate globally under the WPS agenda, ensuring that Palestinian women's voices are not lost in global agendas.[3] Social workers Hayam Farhat and Faten Harb now live in the tents among the Gazans displaced to the Al-Mawasi area, yet they work on a daily basis to help their community, and women in particular, survive and keep the social fabric together. These women are not carrying out one-off acts of heroism – they are part of an extensive history of Palestinian women sustaining life under siege: running shelters, bringing food, counseling for trauma, and holding together communities that have been ripped apart by violence.

Yet even though women are bearing the heaviest burdens and exemplifying extraordinary leadership, they continue to be absent at the negotiating tables where their futures are decided. Their work is not even relegated to footnotes, as if survival work and grassroots leadership were less important than high diplomacy. This erasure is not merely a question of injustice – it is dangerously nearsighted. Peace without women is neither stable nor sustainable. To exclude Palestinian women from reconstruction and governing processes is to ignore the very actors who have made life in Gaza possible, enabling their families and communities to survive.

Artwork by Gazan artist Malak Matar.



Resolution 1325 is based on the four pillars of participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. All four are mere rhetoric, all four have failed in Palestine.

Participation: Women have been excluded from high-level negotiations, from Oslo to Annapolis and beyond, as well as from reconciliation tables for intra-Palestinian dialogue for unity. This denies half the population a voice in their future.

Protection: International law requires combatants to protect civilians. Palestinian women are instead vulnerable to bombardments, settler violence, and harassment at checkpoints.

Prevention: Root cause analysis is at the heart of the UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda. But the root cause of Palestinian misery – continued military occupation – is never discussed.

Relief and Recovery: Relief and reconstruction consistently overlook women's needs, from reproductive health to psychosocial support.

Twenty-five years after the issuing of WPS, Palestine is the case study textbook example of how in the face of political reluctance the resolution can be diluted into meaningless rhetoric.

Feminist critiques of international responses are worth touching upon. Feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe have long warned that the WPS agenda risks tokenism if power relations remain unchallenged.[4] In Palestine, this critique is glaring. Global players talk of empowering women but fail to hold back Israel's military invasion and occupation. Palestinian women are positioned as recipients of charity rather than political agents of change. This erasure is a hallmark of colonial paternalism, where the situation of women is recognized by global powers only when convenient.

Yet Palestinian women have been agents of peacebuilding: In spite of structural marginalization, they have continued to shape resistance and peacebuilding. During the first Intifada, women initiated boycotts, established underground schools, and maintained alternative economies. Today, women's groups such as the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development, the General Union of Palestinian Women, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs document abuses, assist survivors, and organize advocacy at the UN. Women in Gaza's shelters are organizing food delivery, informal education, and trauma counseling. They are peacebuilding in practice, even if the international system does not necessarily define their actions as such.[5]

Structural impediments to women's leadership continue: Even as their fundamental contributions are acknowledged, Palestinian women are structurally excluded from formal political decision-making institutions not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank and all of occupied Palestine – an exclusion driven by patriarchy and colonialism. Military occupation structurally bureaucratizes gendered violence: curtailment of mobility, economic repression, and marginalization severely constrain women's access to education, to the economy, and to the public sphere. These are not simply secondary effects of war but instruments of dominance that enshrine patriarchal hegemony and prevent any possibility of inclusive governance.

At the same time, the entrenched male hegemony that prevails in Palestinian political organizations such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority limits women's access to leadership. Even activities that are self-consciously bounded by international norms, such as UNSCR 1325, seldom do more than ensure a token participation. Funds, training, and planning provided by donors are all too often ineffectual in leading to political change. Decades of overseas assistance spent on gender empowerment has yielded too little structural change – a disappointment symptomatic of a broader aversion to grappling with the intersection of colonialism and patriarchy.

The diplomatic fatigue we are witnessing has a gendered cost, as it effectively legitimizes gendered violence and grants the perpetrator impunity!

Faced with a well-documented, 24-month genocide, and on the 77th anniversary of an unremitting *Nakba*, we have never been more in need of turning around and looking critically



Artwork by Gazan artist Malak Matar.



Artwork by Gazan artist Malak Matar.

In order to shift the WPS agenda from rhetoric to reality, what would it require for Palestine to be the test case of a serious WPS agenda?[8]

Accountability: Bring an end to impunity for war, occupation, and settlement crimes. International law needs to be implemented, not merely invoked.

Inclusion: Ensure women's equal involvement in any peace process. The experiences of Liberia and Northern Ireland demonstrate that women's involvement renders peace agreements more durable.

Gender-Responsive Aid: Reproductive health, psychosocial support, and protection from gender-based violence should be prioritized in humanitarian aid.

Sanctions and Pressure: Go beyond symbolic recognition. Prohibit settlement products, end arms exports to Israel, and sanction war criminals.

Empowerment of Grassroots Women's Movements: Fund directly Palestinian women's organizations that already provide for besieged communities.

at the politics and society that we've constructed. And along the way, we must confront a blinding, decades-long rarely spoken truth: Palestinian women are systematically denied the seat of decision-making.

From armed resistance to diplomacy, from street activism to political platforms across the globe, Palestinian women have led the struggle for resistance and change for decades. And yet, despite all their tireless efforts, real political representation remains far, far removed for Palestinian women. If we dig deeper into the numbers, the truth is even worse – and chilling.

Women constitute 49.3 percent of the Palestinian populace and 49.6 percent of public sector workers. But they occupy only 14.9 percent of leadership positions (director general and higher). Women comprise 26 percent of local government council members, but only 5 percent are deputy heads, and less than 1 percent (0.7 percent) are council heads. At the cabinet level, women occupy no more than 14.3 percent of ministry seats – a total of just four ministers – and there is one lone woman governor among sixteen in the West Bank and Gaza (6.3 percent). In the police force, a stingy 4.5 percent are women. In the PLO, it is not much better: not a single woman is on the Executive Committee. Women occupy 13 percent of the seats in the National Council and 30 percent of Central Council seats.

World leaders must move from the long-overdue recognition to carrying out responsibility.

In foreign affairs institutions, only 17 percent of the Palestinian ambassadors who travel abroad to represent the nation are women, even though women make up 57 percent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' public servants and 44 percent of foreign affairs officials.

Similarly, in the medical, academic, judicial, and business fields, Palestinian women are noticeably underrepresented in leadership roles: for example, although they constitute 30 percent of faculty at universities, they occupy only 10.7 percent of university board membership seats.

These figures speak of a continuing exclusion. Enabling larger numbers of Palestinian women to take on the highest decision-making positions is not a token to be shown to the international community; it is an internal matter of legitimacy and a national imperative.

The exclusion of women from political representation is a conscious exclusion of half of Palestinian society and prevents them from actively forming the very democracy that we wish to preserve in international institutions. Women in Palestine have a double burden: one of occupation and oppression, and one of politics and structural barriers in society. And yet, women have persistently proven their leadership, creativity, and presence in academia, diplomacy, civil society, and so forth.

It is time that we stop treating Palestinian women as a "special case" to be dealt with by tokenism.

Instead, we must re-envision our model of national leadership so that women's voices, experiences, and vision are incorporated in an organic manner. Inclusive leadership is not only a political imperative – it is the foundation for any fair and sustainable future for Palestine. If gender justice is ever to be had in Palestine, it must be conceived of as a national and political necessity. It is not a question of seats on backwater committees or quotas. Palestinian women are not a "segment" of society – they're half of it and must be regarded as such in any government and negotiation forum.

Decades of impasse have left the international community reeling from "diplomatic fatigue." The 2020 Abraham



Artwork by Gazan artist Malak Matar.

Accords entirely sidestepped Palestinian rights, instead focusing on normalization between Israel and Arab countries. For women, this fatigue means diminishing aid, less advocacy, and reduced visibility. This fatigue is not neutral. It legitimates impunity. By overlooking the occupation, the world normalizes gendered violence and entrenches Palestinian women's dispossession.

The degradation of Gaza's health infrastructure renders gendered repercussions unavoidable. The World Health Organization informs us that more than 60 percent of Gaza's hospitals are currently out of commission.[6] For women, this has meant that pregnant women are giving birth without anesthetics. C-sections are being performed by candlelight or phone torches. Breast cancer patients have been unable to receive chemotherapy. And menstrual hygiene products are so unavailable that women are resorting to using unsafe alternatives.

These circumstances demonstrate how humanitarian responses habitually neglect to meet women's needs.

The latest diplomatic flurry – with Saudi Arabia and France leading a tsunami to recognize the State of Palestine along with ten major powers – namely, the UK, Belgium, Canada, Australia, Portugal, Malta, Luxembourg, San Marino, Andorra – is symbolically significant. However, recognition is not sufficient. Without mechanisms to rescue women from violence, halt the growth of settlements, and ensure accountability, statehood may become no more than another hollow promise. As feminist theorists remind us, peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice. Justice for Palestinian women necessitates dismantling settler colonialism, ending occupation, and inserting women into decision-making.[7]

In conclusion, we can assert that justice is a precondition for peace!

The Palestinian example lays bare the hollowness of the WPS agenda when it is severed from justice. Palestinian women are not passive victims or helpless bystanders. They are leaders, organizers, and peacebuilders. Their role must be respected by the international community through a shift from rhetorical commitment to tangible action. Ending the occupation, holding perpetrators accountable, and empowering women as equal partners are not optional measures – they are the imperatives of sustainable peace.

Once the genocide ends and reconstruction begins, it cannot end with buildings and roads – it must rebuild trust, justice, and social fabric. And this cannot be done without the leadership of women. Palestinian women are organizers, mediators, and custodians of life under siege. The question is not whether women will rebuild Gaza – they already are – but whether their leadership will be respected and institutionalized.

Gender-blind reconstruction threatens to replicate past injustices. Whether it concerns well-meaning aid that bypasses women's organizations or security policies that ignore community-level grievances and gender violence, in order to be credible, peace must be fashioned by women at all levels of governance, reconstruction, and justice. A feminist reconstruction requires women in decision-making roles in reconstruction agencies, gender audits of aid, and gender-sensitive monitoring mechanisms. Women's participation in governance, transitional justice, and peace negotiations must be guaranteed. Otherwise, reconstruction will entrench inequality rather than heal it. Overall, the reconstruction of Gaza and the day after for Palestine must be feminist: inclusive, participatory, and grounded in women's lived experience. Anything less risks replicating exclusion and undermining peace itself.

Networks such as the Women, Peace and Security Working Group in the Arab States Region, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, and the Global Alliance have already set an example: they are uniting women across borders, opening doors to diplomacy, and mainstreaming feminist leadership in peacebuilding. This is not symbolic inclusion – it is structural change.[9] If the WPS agenda is to have any meaning at all, Palestine has to be its litmus test. Anything less is complicity in injustice.

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Rethinking Restitution
A Commentary



By Terry Rempel

This article was originally written four years ago for a special issue of This Week in Palestine *on the Palestinian neighborhoods of Western Jerusalem. When asked by* TWiP *for the permission to republish an updated version of the article in the current issue, titled "Right Under Siege: A Global Call for Justice in Palestine," I worried that my text was too dated. Clearly, had I written the piece today, the unprecedented scope and scale of destruction in Gaza and prospects for restitution would have figured front and center. So would genocide, in particular, the removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands and homelands as a central pillar of settler-colonial projects such as the one in Palestine. I would have also reflected on the implications of South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, especially how it situated Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, both temporally and geographically, within Raphael Lemkin's more capacious (than the Genocide Convention) understanding of genocide and related means of group destruction. I have nevertheless chosen to leave the article mostly unchanged, if only because the fundamental issues of context and history – which I address at the end of the article, however inadequately – are the issues which Gaza forces, and must force, us to reckon with. If Israel's genocidal policies and practices of removal and replacement are seen in the microcosm of the Palestinian neighborhoods of West Jerusalem, we can see a similar process, albeit infinitely more destructive, at large unfolding in Gaza today.*

Writing about housing, land, and property restitution in the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem may seem somewhat detached from present realities, as Palestinians elsewhere in the city, other territories occupied by Israel in 1967, and across the Green Line are struggling to remain in their homes, on their lands, and in possession of other properties. In June 2021 alone, OCHA reported that Israeli demolition of Palestinian-owned structures in the occupied West Bank, including the eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem, displaced 108 people and affected nearly 2,700 others in terms of livelihoods and access to services, a seven-fold increase over May 2021 and the second highest monthly total this year.[1]

Significant as these statistics may be, they likely underestimate the scope and scale of ongoing displacement and dispossession; a more comprehensive accounting would need to consider other causes of forced displacement – eviction, revocation of residency rights, denial of family reunification, confiscation of land, etc. – in addition to the vulnerability of Palestinian citizens of Israel to displacement through the application of similar measures.

Yet, as Huda Imam observed in her "Journey through Sheikh Jarrah" in the June 2021 issue of *This Week in Palestine*, efforts by settlers to evict Palestinian residents from Jewish-claimed properties in the eastern neighborhood of Jerusalem over the past fifty years raise the obvious question of why the State of Israel prevents Palestinians displaced from the western part of the city, including Imam whose family has title to property in the Baqa' neighborhood, from repossessing their homes,

East Jerusalem from the east.





Kassissieh family building in Qatamon.

lands, and other properties. Before answering that question, it is perhaps useful to consider briefly the workings of restitution in Jerusalem since the 1967 war, that is to say, how Jews are able to repossess homes, lands, and properties in one part of the city while Palestinians are denied the same opportunity in the other. A few additional words about developments in the law and practice of housing, land, and property restitution for refugees and displaced persons elsewhere will help place Palestinian claims in broader context.

The legal mechanism for restitution in this particular case can be found in the 1968 Legal and Administrative Matters Law (a consolidated version appeared two years later). The law essentially aimed to address certain anomalies arising from Israel's military occupation and subsequent application of its law to the eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem after the 1967 war. This included the status of Palestinian residents, most of whom held Jordanian citizenship, who suddenly became absentees with regard to their homes, lands, and properties under Israel's 1950 Absentees' Property Law. The transfer of this property to the state – through the Custodian of Absentees' Property and the Development Authority, the body that had been set up to launder refugee properties after the 1948 war – may have been desirable from a Zionist perspective. Enforcement of the 1950 law in the eastern part of the city, however, created what Israeli then-Foreign Minister Yair Lapid described in reference to the demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar as "international challenges." While it remains to be seen how Israel will handle the pending erasure of Khan al-Ahmar (likely to proceed after Israel gave final approval for the E1 colonization plan to proceed), the Legal and Administrative Matters Law provided a solution of sorts to the earlier problem by stipulating that Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem – i.e., those registered in Israel's 1967 census – shall not be regarded as absentees in respect of property situated in "that area" of the city (the significance of the quotes will soon become apparent). This seemed fair enough, although it should be noted that the Absentees' Property Law still applied to Palestinians not registered in Israel's 1967 census, as well as to those whose residency status was revoked by Israel, to property owners who resided outside the city, and those who for other reasons were considered enemies of the Jewish state.

The Legal and Administrative Matters Law further stipulated that housing, land, and other properties in the city, with few exceptions (e.g., public purpose), had to be returned to their original owners. It was this provision that enabled Jewish property owners to repossess homes, lands, and properties in the Old City and eastern neighborhoods of the city that had been administered since the 1948 war by the Jordanian Custodian of Enemy Property. This again seemed fair enough. Whether Jewish organizations intent on colonizing eastern Jerusalem should be entitled to claim properties in "that area" of the city is another matter. More practically, enabling Jews to repossess homes, lands, and properties in the eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem raised the prospect that Palestinian residents of those same neighborhoods who originated from the western parts of the city – estimated to comprise around a quarter of the population of eastern Jerusalem in 1995 – would use the law to claim their own homes, lands, and other properties in the western neighborhoods. In short, Israel prevented this from happening by restricting the application of this provision in the Legal and Administrative Matters Law to the eastern part of Jerusalem, which the law referred to discretely as "that area" of the city. Incidentally, the non-application of the 1950 Absentees' Property Law to Jewish absentees after the 1948 war prefigured the differential and discriminatory treatment of Palestinian claims in the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem two decades later.

This was not what the United Nations Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte had in mind when he recommended in his September 1948 Progress Report that the UN affirm "the right of the Arab refugees to return to their homes" and that a conciliation commission be set up "to supervise and assist their repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation and payment of compensation for the property of those choosing not to return." Bernadotte's recommendations also covered the comparatively smaller number of Jews displaced within and from Palestine as a result of the 1948 war, including those who owned homes, lands, and other properties in the eastern neighborhoods of Jerusalem. To what degree the Swedish diplomat, who had negotiated the release of prisoners from German concentration camps only a few years earlier, was influenced by precedents being set in Europe regarding the restitution of property after the Second World War is unclear. Although it is likely that his small team of advisors, including principal secretary Ralph Bunche and legal advisor Constantin Stavropoulos, were well aware of these precedents. For various reasons, including Lemkin's correspondence with Bernadotte, all three may have also been cognizant of Lemkin's work on genocide. Echoes of Lemkin's more capacious understanding of genocide can also be found in the mediator's report, in particular, his fear that displaced Palestinians who had lived in the land of Palestine for centuries would be replaced by Jewish settlers.[2]

Bernadotte's recommendations formed the basis of a series of American, British, and UN draft texts that eventually coalesced on December 11, 1948, into General Assembly Resolution 194. In its *Analysis of Paragraph 11 of the General Assembly's Resolution of 11 December 1948* (1950), the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), the body set up to facilitate the implementation of Resolution 194, observed that "if refugees not returning are to be compensated for their property, those returning would re-occupy their homes and be compensated for losses and damages." During the debate, the British representative, when asked, specifically stated that these provisions applied to refugees from the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem.

Paragraph 11 in many ways prefigured developments in law and practice governing solutions for refugees and displaced persons fifty years later, when the Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Israel signed the 1993 Declaration of Principles. From the beginning of the 1990s, a plethora of UN bodies – the International Law Commission, human rights treaty committees, the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and peace-building missions – addressed a range of issues that related to housing, land, and property restitution, including its application to refugees and displaced persons. Restitution principles and procedures could also be found in peace agreements around the world as part of a standard package of elements that are widely recognized as central to durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons. While the 1990s may have been the decade of repatriation, as then High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata described the period, these years might also be described as the decade of housing, land, and property restitution. The difficulties that refugees and displaced persons encountered along the way as well as an assessment of the outcome of their efforts to return to their homes, reclaim lands, and repossess other properties are significant matters that have been elaborated by others elsewhere.[3]

These were among the precedents for Palestinian claims referred to in *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighbourhoods of the City and Their Fate in the War* (1999, 2002), an edited collection of studies published by the Institute of Jerusalem Studies and BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Refugee and Residency Rights on the eve of final status talks between Israel and the PLO. The project aimed to shed light on a chapter in the modern history of Jerusalem that is frequently overshadowed by the struggle of Palestinians to remain in their homes, on their lands, and in possession of their properties in the eastern neighborhoods of the city, a struggle that has been ongoing since the 1967 war. Presenting initial findings from the joint initiative, along with information about a related film entitled *Yoom Ilak, Yoom Aleik: Palestinian Refugees from Jerusalem, 1948: Heritage, Eviction & Hope*, BADIL's newsletters from the period also carried stories about the colonization of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, revocation of residency rights, and denial of family reunification along with Palestinian efforts to prevent the destruction of what remained of the village of Lifta, one of four villages depopulated during the 1948 war and subsequently annexed to the western part of Jerusalem. The book also sought to provide context for concepts and realities – e.g., the terms "East" and "West" Jerusalem and the demographic division of the city before the colonization of the eastern neighborhoods – which appeared beyond question, at least in terms of the discourse in which the Middle East peace process was framed, by the time when Palestinians and Israelis gathered around the negotiating table in the late 1990s and early 2000s to deal with so-called final status issues that include Jerusalem and the refugees.

Also notable in terms of restitution principles, though hardly mentioned in the literature on Palestinian refugees during the period, including my own contributions, was the 1993 Abuja Proclamation that was adopted by the first Pan-African Conference on Reparations for African Enslavement, Colonization and Neo-Colonization. Sponsored by the Organization of African Unity and its Reparations Commission, the proclamation captures the essence of what many Palestinians today refer to as their "ongoing *Nakba*." Conference participants declared that they were "fully persuaded that damages sustained by the African peoples is not a "thing of the past" but rather painfully manifest in the damaged lives of contemporary Africans from Harlem to Harare and in the damaged economies of the Black World from Guinea to Guyana and from Somalia to Surinam. German reparations to Jews (individuals, organizations, and the State of Israel) after the Holocaust recalled in the proclamation were also among the precedents that the UNCCP identified as important to Palestinian refugee claims after the 1948 war.

Significant here, of course, is that the precedent-setting Luxembourg Agreement between Germany, the State of Israel, and Jewish organizations was being negotiated at the same time that the UNCCP was seeking an agreement to repair the losses suffered by Palestinian refugees as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Sami Hadawi, who worked in the Department of Land Settlement during the British administration of Palestine and as a land specialist with (and subsequent critic of) the UNCCP, along with the Arab economist Atef Kubursi, drew upon the same precedent some thirty years later in *Palestinian Rights and Losses in 1948: A Comprehensive Study* (1988). Emphasizing that no financial award, however large, could compensate fully for the loss of a homeland, they argued that an accurate assessment, which included both material losses and human suffering, would provide an indication of the magnitude of the 1948 *Nakba.* Notably, they added that an assessment of losses suffered since then would require a separate investigation. The establishment of a World Jewish Restitution Organization to pursue claims in post-Communist eastern Europe in the 1990s, along with campaigns for the release of dormant accounts in Swiss banks, and reparations from German companies for slave labor, reignited interest in German reparations as the Middle East peace process got under way. It was these precedents that refugee activists, Palestinian unionists, politicians, and

personalities in national institutions, researchers, NGOs, and independent figures in Palestine also drew upon in a petition entitled "Restitution: A Basic Human Right," issued on the eve of final status negotiations between the PLO and Israel. The petition continued a long and diverse tradition of Palestinian resistance to displacement and dispossession, much of which has been overlooked and ignored in conventional accounts of high-level negotiations that have attempted to find solutions to the so-called refugee problem – not necessarily the problems faced by refugees.

The losses suffered during the *Nakba*, as Sami Hadawi, Atef Kubursi and so many others have pointed out, extended well beyond the loss of homes, lands, and other properties. This is evident in the descriptions of pre-war life in the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem and in surrounding villages of the city, found in the chapters of *Jerusalem 1948*, many of which rely upon memoirs and oral history interviews with displaced residents. The displacement and dispossession of Palestinians from Baqa', Qatamon, Talbiya, the Greek Colony, and the many other neighborhoods that make up the western parts of the city marked "the loss of an entire world that exemplified Jerusalem and Palestine" before its conquest during the 1948 war and subsequent dissolution. As Salim Tamari observes in the introduction to the book, Jerusalem was "a city of considerable social mobility, of ethnic diversity, and of communal conflict that was tempered by a fair amount of mutual dependence on local solidarities." The map of real estate holdings in the western neighborhoods (attached to the book), which Sami Hadawi, himself a refugee from Qatamon, first prepared for the New York–based Palestine Arab Refugee Office in the late 1950s (one of the numerous initiatives mentioned above), reflects the emerging realities in Jerusalem, as described in the book on the eve of the 1948 war. Tamari's further observation that the portrait of the city is one that today is unrecognizable – an observation that can hardly be overstated – further underscores the limitations of a narrow definition of restitution that is centered on the return of homes, lands, and other properties, as significant as these may be.

It is this broader loss that Palestinian representatives, such as jurist Henry Cattan, a refugee from the Baqa' neighborhood, along with Arab and other allies perhaps sought to redress during the drafting of Resolution 194, when they demanded that paragraph 11 also address the economic, social, and political rights of the refugees. From their perspective, in addition to the individual rights of return, restitution, and compensation, the resolution should have also affirmed the right of Palestinians as a people to return to their homeland, a demand that took another twenty-five years of struggle to codify in General Assembly Resolution 3236 (only to be vetoed by the United States in the Security Council). It remains, in practice, unrealized to this day. It is this broader definition of restitution, that is to say, restitution as decolonization that resonates in the findings of a 2018 BADIL survey of refugee and internally displaced youth in Palestine, Israel, and major Arab host countries. While many youth struggled to conceptualize what return would look like in practice, something that the editors



Andoni Baramki building in West Jerusalem.

of the *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons* (vol. 9) attributed to inadequate or absent discourse of return, most respondents nevertheless "recognized that physical return alone is not enough; that return must be sustainable and create an environment that not only addresses the injustice, but fulfills the social and economic rights of the returnees."[4] In addition to property documentation and socio-economic rehabilitation, they also identified reparations for the various crimes and violations arising from colonization as the most important problems to be addressed once their return has been realized.

Reading news in the spring of 2021 about the ongoing *Nakba* in Jerusalem (which ranged from forced evictions and demolitions to the revocation of residency rights, along with Palestinian efforts to preserve what remains of the depopulated village of Lifta) from the vantage point of Canada (where stories of the unmarked and yet to be identified graves of well over a thousand Indigenous children – and most likely many more – who perished in Church-run residential schools funded by the Canadian government have filled, and fueled, the news over the summer), I am reminded of Tom King's observation in *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, published in 2012: "Most of us think that history is the past. It's not. History is the stories we tell about the past." Summarizing his narrative journey through hundreds of years of Indigenous history, King, an Indigenous author, activist, and academic from the Cherokee nation, concludes that "in terms of attitudes, in terms of dispossession and intolerance, nothing much has changed. [History] turns out to be our present. It may well be our future."

Returning to Gaza, it is not hard to find King's words reverberating in the literature on Palestine. Introducing his graphic novel *Footnotes in Gaza*, for example, Joe Sacco writes: "As someone in Gaza told me, 'events are continuous.' Palestinians never seem to have the luxury of digesting one tragedy before the next one is upon them. When I was in Gaza, younger people often viewed my research into the events of 1956 with bemusement. What good would tending to history do them when they were under attack and their homes were being demolished now? But the past and present cannot be so easily disentangled; they are part of a remorseless continuum, a historical blur." I am also reminded of the observation made by Elias Sanbar, the Palestinian historian and author of "Palestine 1948: l'expulsion," published in the French-language daily *Libération* on the eve of Israel's 1982 invasion and the massacre of refugees in Sabra and Shatila, asserting that "Palestinians are the American Indians of the Jewish settlers in Palestine. In their eyes," Sanbar writes, "our one and only role consists in disappearing."[5]

Why are these observations important, and what do they have to do with Palestinian restitution in the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem? Simply put, they bring to the fore an analytical framework that is absent from much of the scholarly and policy production in recent decades on housing, land, and property restitution for refugees and displaced persons, with the notable exception of comparative work on South Africa. Of course, settler colonialism in Palestine has its unique features – the presence of an Indigenous Jewish population that predates Zionist colonization, the impossibility of non-Jews to assimilate within the Jewish state, and one of the world's largest refugee populations (exceeded only in recent years by Syria), to name a few – but this is no different from other settler colonies, and it should not preclude a considered comparison of the phenomenon. Understanding settler colonialism as "structure and not an event," with land as its "specific, irreducible element," as Patrick Wolfe so usefully explains in "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" in the *Journal of Genocide Research* (2006), arguably helps to better explain Israel's dispossession of Palestinians in Jerusalem, elsewhere in the territories occupied by the Jewish state since 1967, and across the Green Line, ongoing since the 1948 war. The analytic also helps to explain the country's domestic legislation – from the 1950 Absentees' Property Law and 1970 Legal and Administrative Matters Law to the plethora of Basic (Constitutional) Laws governing Israel Lands (1960), Human Dignity and Liberty (1992), and Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People (2018) – under which restitution is virtually impossible.

While there is a rich body of early literature to draw upon, most notably the writings of Fayez Sayegh, complemented by an emerging corpus of new research, some of which can be found in the journal *Settler Colonial Studies*, the challenges of restitution for Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, including those who originate from the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem, in a settler-colonial context, whether historical or today, have barely been touched upon.[6] Fruitful areas of inquiry might include a more critical consideration of international law; the colonial origins of important doctrines such as sovereignty, in particular; whether and how the handling of Indigenous claims by settler colonies such as the United States and Canada impinge on their respective foreign policies regarding housing, land, and property restitution for Palestinian refugees; the roles that wider solidarity movements have played and continue to play in reparations for colonialism (and its settler-colonial variety); comparative research on restitution as decolonization in Africa (beyond post-apartheid South Africa), Asia, and the Americas; and, lastly, consideration and foregrounding of Indigenous resistance to dispossession and their struggles for restitution. This is not to dismiss the value of existing research, nor to suggest that the cases are the same. I merely wish to emphasize that in the absence of a settler-colonial analytic, the research on housing, land, and property restitution for Palestinian refugees is arguably ahistorical and incomplete, which in turn raises critical questions about its relevance for both policy and solidarity. As the NDN Collective observes in *The Right of Return Is Landback*: "Although our peoples come from different nations and geographies, the struggles against settler colonialism are the same. Not because we or our struggles are the same, but because settler colonists share playbooks."[7]

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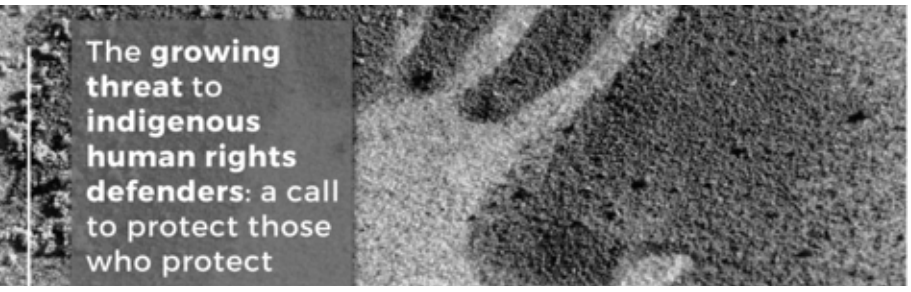
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AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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For over 25 years, Al Mezan has documented and reported on violations against Palestinians in Gaza, bringing evidence of these crimes before the eyes of the international community. Our field researchers have documented every Israeli assault on Gaza between 2008 and 2021, the devastating impact of the blockade and closure unlawfully imposed on Gaza since 2007, the Great March of Return, and nearly every daily human rights violation committed against Palestinians, regardless of the perpetrator. Our lawyers have provided free legal aid to thousands of Palestinians facing grave human rights abuses, including hundreds of prisoners and detainees.

For over 75 years, the rights and freedoms of Palestinians have been violated in numerous and increasingly severe ways. As an organization made up almost entirely of Palestinian human rights defenders who are currently themselves enduring Israel's genocide in Gaza, there is a highly personal and existential motivation to defend these rights and freedoms. Every human being deserves to live with dignity, and upholding international human rights is the cornerstone of this fundamental value.

Our staff members are especially proud of the tangible work we do that has positive effects on Palestinians in Gaza. The human rights defenders at Al Mezan take pride in providing legal services to Palestinians who have been arbitrarily detained. This work ranges from investigating cases of Palestinians who have disappeared or been arbitrarily detained, to helping their families determine the health and legal status of their loved ones, ensuring that their condition in detention centers is monitored, and pressuring Israeli forces to reduce or limit torture of detainees. Our staff members have also advocated for patient access to hospitals amid Israel's continued violations of our right to freedom of movement. Being a Gaza-based organization, we also advocate for human rights violations to be investigated by local Gaza authorities. Al Mezan monitors the legislation and regulations that are part of the Israeli occupation. First and foremost, our human rights defenders document, report, and expose the reality of Israel's brutal occupation of Palestinians and the international crimes being committed against us.

Right now, the situation in Gaza is beyond catastrophic. It is estimated that at least 230,000 Palestinians, around 10 percent of Gaza's population, have been killed or injured since October 2023. Israel has, for nearly two years, continuously targeted Palestinians, destroyed residential areas and essential infrastructure, decimated Gaza's healthcare system, and imposed a complete siege that has barred humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies, from entering Gaza. These cruel tools of genocide have created a man-made famine and life-threatening living conditions caused by extreme pollution, overcrowding, and exposure to the elements.[1]

These are the conditions under which human rights defenders in Gaza are working. Every day, those who work with Al Mezan and their families face deliberate targeting, displacement, and intimidation. Human rights defenders in Gaza have always faced extreme risks due to the nature of our work, confronting Israel as an

Palestinians travel along Al-Rasheed Street as they are forcibly displaced by Israeli forces from Gaza City under threat to leave or be killed. Photos, taken on September 16, 2025, courtesy of Al Mezan.





The agony of being forcibly displaced by Israeli forces.

occupying power that has for decades demonstrated complete disregard for international laws and standards. Now, staff members in Gaza face even greater risk of being fatally targeted, as traveling to meet with victims and clients increases the risk of being caught up in an attack.

Gaza-based staff members have demonstrated heroic dedication to defending international human rights and upholding international law in Gaza, and they are doing so under unimaginably difficult conditions. Despite the extremely arduous work of supporting independent investigations and providing documentation and evidence of Israel's genocide while we live in the midst of it, the international community has refused to take decisive action to stop Israel from continuing the genocide. This inaction has shamefully persisted in spite of the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in January 2024, which triggered the Genocide Convention's obligation to prevent it when they alerted states of the risk of genocide in Gaza. Evidence that this is a genocide has only accumulated. Reports published since October 2023 overwhelmingly point to the same conclusion: Israel is conducting a genocide in Gaza.[2]

Considering the ever increasing number of reports that state the same conclusion, it is no coincidence then that Israel and its allies have increased their efforts to silence Palestinian human rights defenders who dare to speak out. The intensifying attempt to silence Palestinian voices through undue punishment, intimidation, and even death is part of a decades-long campaign by Israel and its allies to minimize exposure of Israel's crimes. Since 2023, Israel has consistently targeted Palestinian journalists to stop them from reporting on the genocide.[3] Israel's 2025 budget included a massive spending increase for its "hasbara" operations focused on changing perceptions of Israel on social media and in the international press.[4]

These developments of course pose a threat to our ability as human rights defenders to ensure that Palestinians' stories areheard, but it pales in comparison to the impact that sanctions have had on our organization. In February 2025, the United States, Israel's closest ally, began to impose an expansive and completely unjust sanctions regime to target the International Criminal Court (ICC) under Executive Order 14203. On September 4, 2025, Al Mezan, Al-Haq, and PCHR were sanctioned under this Executive Order for engaging in "efforts by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute Israeli nationals, without Israel's consent."[5]

In other words, we are sanctioned for exposing Israel's international crimes and participating in the justice-seeking mechanisms that are currently available to us. These sanctions are politically motivated and are an egregious, blatant, and completely unjust attempt to punish those involved in investigating Israel and demanding that the Israeli political and military leadership be held accountable for the most horrific atrocities and crimes in living memory. These sanctions not only strip Palestinians of their access to justice but also intimidate all human rights defenders who have a duty to pursue legal remedies for justice.

These sanctions are explicitly intended to silence us, but we will not allow them to stop us from continuing to document and expose Israel's international crimes. The effects of sanctions, however, are far-reaching. Our American partners have had to abruptly cut ties with us, ending existing partnerships in order to comply with US law. Non-US partners have also had to undertake risk assessments because they may have American staff members, branches in the US, or other American assets. International staff members have also had to resign due to the far-reaching consequences of these sanctions and the risk of reprisal.

International reaction to these sanctions has been hugely disappointing. The ICC is supposed to be an international law success story for Europe after the horrors of World War II, and yet, European governments have barely reacted to these sanctions with decisive action. It is clear that European and Western states have a clear double standard when it comes to human rights defenders advocating for Palestinian human rights. International human rights standards should be applied equally across the board. The fact that European states can uphold these dehumanizing double standards despite being the so-called champions of the current international legal system exposes the shortcomings of this system, especially when it comes to protecting human rights defenders.

International human rights standards are important and should remain so. They are undoubtedly relevant to our increasingly globalized and interconnected world; states need to adhere to them. We believe that a major shortcoming of the current structure of international law is that the mechanisms in place, such as international covenants and conventions, are not set up to prevent or stop violations quickly and decisively. Action often relies entirely on political will to take action, which completely undermines the efficacy of international law. This is true even for the Genocide Convention, which requires states to prevent genocide when there is even a risk of genocide and does not require them to wait until an international court has determined that genocide is being perpetrated, because at that point it would be too late. Despite the International Court of Justice's indication of the risk of genocide in January 2024, there has been little response to this mechanism because there is no political will to act. From this example, it is clear that the mechanisms in place are incapable of preventing or stopping violations decisively, making them ineffective for human rights defenders.

Forcibly displaced.



The international community and especially human rights defenders have made great sacrifices to enshrine the human rights that everyone should enjoy. The values of freedom, justice, and human rights that are reflected in international covenants also represent the foundational principles of the United Nations and other international institutions that are supposed to equally apply international standards. The clear double standards when it comes to dealing with Palestinian human rights undermines global confidence in the effectiveness of this system and the accessibility of these mechanisms for human rights defenders. Therefore, although we believe that international human rights standards are relevant and play an important role in international law, enforcement measures and mechanisms need to be further developed and updated to keep up with contemporary challenges and fast-paced developments.

In addition to the general ineffectiveness of the human rights mechanisms available to human rights defenders, these processes are not even easily accessible. Participation in these mechanisms requires specialized legal knowledge that may not be easily accessed or even freely available to most individuals. For the human rights defenders diligently working for Al Mezan, there is the added layer of not being able to reliably access the internet to communicate and coordinate with colleagues or even conduct legal research to enhance the specialized knowledge required to participate in these forums.

Another major barrier for human rights defenders such as ourselves is the risk associated with participating in international justice-seeking mechanisms within a geopolitical environment that appears to be increasingly hostile toward human rights defenders. We have been subjected to more harassment and retaliatory measures, exemplified by the recent US sanctions. Together with the inherent threat and intimidation that emanates from these sanctions, the deafening silence from states that claim to support the rules-based international legal order deters other human rights defenders from engaging in justice-seeking mechanisms. Human rights defenders around the world cannot be expected to comfortably participate in international justice mechanisms such as the ICC when it is clear that the world will abandon them if they are sanctioned for their participation.

Nevertheless, we human rights defenders at Al Mezan will not be deterred from exploring creative solutions to the constraints imposed on us by the US sanctions regime. We will continue to advocate for justice and for Palestinian human rights to be upheld. Despite the challenges presented by these sanctions, we stress that these obstacles are nothing compared to the constant threat of death that follows our staff members in Gaza as they navigate how to survive Israel's genocide and famine.



Al Mezan Center for Human Rights is an independent, nonpartisan, nongovernmental human rights organization based in the occupied Gaza Strip. Since its establishment in 1999, Al Mezan has been dedicated to protecting and promoting the respect of human rights, especially economic, social, and cultural rights, supporting victims of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and enhancing democracy, community and citizen participation, and respect for the rule of law in Gaza as part of the occupied Palestinian territory.

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[3] Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Kill the Witness, Hide the Crimes," September 1, 2025.

[4] Jewish Telegraphic Agency and Times of Israel Staff, "Foreign Ministry to Receive Massive Budget for Public Diplomacy Abroad," Times of Israel, December 29, 2024.

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The Politics of Voice

Palestinian Refugees and the Struggle for Justice



By Oroub El-Abed

The Palestinian refugee experience is one of the most protracted in modern history. More than seventy years after the 1948 *Nakba*, over 15 million Palestinians remain scattered across the world. Around six million live in urban settings in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, while others continue to endure cycles of displacement in Gaza and the West Bank. Yet despite this centrality, Palestinian refugee voices have consistently been sidelined in official negotiations. The Oslo process, for instance, relegated the refugee issue to the margins by treating it as a "final status" question. Meanwhile, humanitarian agencies such as UNRWA – though indispensable in providing services – have largely institutionalized refugees as passive beneficiaries rather than political actors in their own right. This persists even though more than 22,000 of UNRWA's own teachers are Palestinian refugees themselves.[1]

Gayatri Spivak's famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" resonates powerfully in the Palestinian context.[2] Refugees are rarely heard as political subjects with rights; instead, they are spoken about in terms of humanitarian need, security risk, or demographic burden. Their political claims and demands for legal protection are either ignored or deliberately silenced. This erasure reflects wider colonial and imperial structures that render Palestinian suffering visible only when framed as humanitarian victimhood, but illegible when expressed as organized resistance.

Palestinian refugees' suffering is not confined to occupation, spatial confinement, or denial of rights under Israeli control. It also extends to conditions of limbo in host countries, where many are denied permanent residency, legal protection, or the right to full participation in society. Generations remain stranded in spaces where their mobility is restricted, their livelihoods are precarious, and their futures uncertain. International institutions – including the UN – have repeatedly failed to secure even the most basic human rights guarantees for these communities, leaving Palestinians unprotected caught between exclusion at home and neglect abroad.

The silencing of Palestinian voices has always gone hand in hand with the systematic colonial transfer of indigenous Palestinians. Since the earliest stages of the Zionist project, displacement has been both a by-product of conflict and a deliberate strategy. As early as 1879, when the first Zionist agricultural colonies were established in historical Palestine, the idea of removing Palestinians from their land was tied to the vision of creating an exclusive Jewish homeland. This strategy reached its most violent expression in 1948, when David Ben-Gurion, the founding prime minister of Israel, described Palestinian removal as "easier than [that] of any other"[3] precisely because of the assumption that neighboring Arab societies shared culture, religion, and geography, making integration possible elsewhere. This logic reduced Palestinians to a population that could be transferred at will, stripped of their rootedness, and economically integrated into the vastness of the Arab

Palestinian and refugee voices must be centered in scholarship, policy, and activism in the struggle for justice, rights, and return.

IDF soldiers expel the residents of Imwas from their village during the 1967 Six Day War. (Photo by www.palestineremembered.com)



world as per the Interim Economic Survey Mission and the UNRWA working agenda. It has been an argument not only for dispossession but for erasure: if Palestinians could be absorbed by "similar" societies, their claim to a distinct homeland could be denied, and their very identity rewritten as interchangeable with other Arabs.

The strategy has gone beyond territorial conquest. It has been an assault on culture and history, attempting to sever Palestinians from their ancient presence on the land, including their origins as Canaanites whose ties long predate modern national claims. This has entailed an assault against generations, dismantling the bonds to the past, family roots, and space. For Palestinians, the denial of belonging has gone far beyond the question of homeland – it has been a denial of their very existence. Those forced from their homes are not simply people displaced by war; they are confronting a system designed to make their uprooting permanent, their absence normalized, and even their starvation reframed as a grotesque form of "diet" against obesity. Their right to return – whether to the houses of their refuge in Gaza following the *Nakba* or to the ancestral homes of their forebears – is rendered unthinkable in dominant narratives. The persistent refusal to recognize Palestinian refugees, who resist against the colonial status quo, as political subjects is not new but a continuation of the same logic that has long sought to erase them. To deny their voice is to deny the memory, and the future, of Palestine itself.

Nowhere is the insistence on Palestinian voice more urgent than in Gaza. Subjected to recurrent wars, a 17-year blockade, and now devastating destruction that amounts to the continuation of ethnic cleansing, Gaza embodies both the precarity and resilience of Palestinian life. The international community often frames Gaza through the language of "humanitarian crisis," yet this vocabulary strips the violence of its political roots. As scholars such as Ilana Feldman and Noura Erakat argue, the crisis in Gaza cannot be divorced from the structures of settler colonialism and military occupation.[4]

The urgency of Palestinian voice is no less evident in the West Bank, where daily realities of settler colonialism unfold in insidious but equally devastating ways. Settler attacks against civilians, often carried out under the protection of the Israeli military, have become routine, targeting homes, schools, and farmers tending their land.[5] Roads are cut and restructured into a network of "belt roads" that carve up Palestinian towns and villages into isolated enclaves, echoing the logic of South African bantustans under apartheid.[6]

IDF soldiers expel the residents of Imwas from their village during the 1967 Six Day War. (Photo by www.palestineremembered.com)



This fragmentation is not incidental; it is a calculated system of control, designed to make Palestinian life unlivable and entrench permanent separation. The violence extends to the land itself. Centuries-old olive trees, symbols of rootedness, livelihood, and continuity, are routinely uprooted, burned, or destroyed by settlers.[7] Sacred spaces in Hebron, Nablus, and Jerusalem are frequently violated, transforming places of worship and community into contested battlegrounds. In Hebron, ethnographic work has documented how checkpoints, curfews, and settler harassment around the Ibrahimi Mosque structure every aspect of Palestinian daily life.[8] In Jerusalem, Palestinians face not only the violation of settlements but also systematic attempts to erase their presence from the city, whether through home demolitions, residency revocations, or restrictions at Al-Aqsa Mosque.[9] Like Gaza, the West Bank embodies both precarity and steadfastness, enduring structured, legalistic, bureaucratic, and normalized exclusion.[10] Elisions of citizenship, rights, land access, and mobility are embedded in the mundane workings of discriminatory Israeli law, administration, and military orders. Palestinians continue to resist the fragmentation of their land and the desecration of their heritage, insisting on their right to remain, to worship, and to live freely. To center their voices is to hear not just stories of dispossession, but affirmations of belonging that defy the machinery of apartheid.

Outside Palestine, refugee camps remain vital spaces of both exile and belonging. In Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, camps have long been portrayed as sites of poverty and violence. Yet ethnographic research shows that camps are also repositories of collective memory and resistance.[11] Oral histories of ethnic cleansing circulate across generations, embedding the right of return as a nonnegotiable principle

The narratives of Palestinian refugees must shape global discourses on colonialism, liberation, and epistemic justice.

in everyday life. In Jordan, where over two million registered refugees reside, Palestinians negotiate their identities as both citizens and refugees, navigating complex realities of integration and exclusion.[12] By foregrounding their perspectives, the struggle for rights extends beyond repatriation – it encompasses claims to political voice, labor rights, and recognition in host societies. Such narratives complicate simplistic portrayals of refugees as passive victims. Instead, they reveal them as active participants shaping their futures, whether through grassroots organizations, educational initiatives, or transnational advocacy networks.

The Palestinian diaspora, from Chile to the United States to Europe, adds another dimension to the conversation on voice and return. Across continents, these communities carry with them the memory of displacement, weaving it into art, literature, and activism that keep the call for justice alive. Edward Said described exile as both a profound loss and a vantage point for critique.[13] Today, Palestinian writers, artists, and organizers in the diaspora embody this duality. They connect their own struggles with global movements for decolonization and racial justice, transforming exile into a platform for solidarity and resistance. Initiatives such as the Palestinian National Conference, the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad, and the 14 Million Palestinian Initiative reflect the agency and determination of Palestinians in the diaspora to remain engaged and politically



active. The resonance of Palestinian activism with movements like Black Lives Matter demonstrates how diaspora voices not only amplify Palestinian claims but also situate them within a broader fight against settler colonialism and systemic racism. In this way, Palestine is reframed as part of a universal struggle for justice – one that binds communities together across borders.

Central to Palestinian voices is the demand for the right of return, enshrined in UN Resolution 194 but consistently deferred or dismissed in international negotiations. Critics often portray return as unrealistic, yet refugees themselves articulate it not only as a legal claim but as an existential and moral necessity. Anthropological research shows that the idea of return is deeply interwoven with identity, memory, and dignity.[14] Moreover, Palestinians define return in diverse and evolving ways. For some, it entails physical repatriation to ancestral lands. For others, it involves recognition, reparations, and the ability to live with dignity in historic Palestine. What unites these perspectives is the refusal to accept erasure. By centering refugee narratives, scholars and policymakers confront the reality that Palestinian futures cannot be charted without acknowledging these voices.

Academic engagement with Palestine carries responsibilities. Too often, scholarship reproduces hierarchies of knowledge, privileging international experts over Palestinian researchers and community voices. Calls for epistemic justice demand that those who live the struggle also define it.[15] This requires not only citing Palestinian voices but also integrating their perspectives into the frameworks that guide analysis. Methodologically, this means decolonizing knowledge production, privileging oral histories, grassroots archives, and collaborative research practices that shift authority toward Palestinian communities. Politically, it entails resisting frameworks that reduce Palestinian claims to humanitarian appeals, insisting instead on centering rights, liberation, and justice as Palestinians themselves define them.

To center Palestinian and refugee voices is to reframe the Palestinian struggle from the ground up. It is to listen to Gazans who speak of survival as resistance, to refugees in camps who preserve the right of return across generations, and to diaspora activists who link Palestine to global decolonial struggles. Their narratives unsettle dominant paradigms, reminding us that justice for Palestine is not a matter of policy negotiation alone but of recognizing the people whose lives embody the struggle. For scholars, policymakers, and activists, the task is clear: Palestinian futures cannot be imagined without Palestinians at the center. Anything less perpetuates the silencing that has long defined this history.

Exclusion is a form of violence.

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Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem's Old City, toward the end of the Ottoman Empire's control over Palestine.

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Pax Christi International

Committed to Nonviolence and a Just Peace in Palestine

Courtesy of Pax Christi International

For 80 years, Pax Christi International has worked globally to promote peace, justice, and reconciliation, guided by Catholic social teaching. As a movement dedicated to Gospel nonviolence, Pax Christi International has long called for reflection on the failures of war and violence, advocating for effective nonviolent tools to nurture the just peace essential to alleviating human suffering. In every action, from grassroots accompaniment to international advocacy, we want to show that nonviolence is not only a moral imperative but also a practical path towards lasting peace.

Our engagement in Palestine combines direct accompaniment, strategic advocacy, and solidarity with local communities. Pilgrimages to the Holy Land allow members to witness the daily realities of Palestinians living under occupation, fostering understanding and reinforcing the organization's commitment to justice. Partnerships with local organizations, such as Wi'am (the Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center) and the Arab Educational Institute–Pax Christi Bethlehem, have strengthened efforts in dialogue, trauma support, and the promotion of nonviolent resistance.

In 2023, Pax Christi International honored the Parents Circle–Families Forum with its Peace Award, recognizing the courage of Israeli and Palestinian families who, despite losing loved ones to violence, work toward reconciliation. Their resilience exemplifies how grief, transformed through dialogue and solidarity, can contribute to the pursuit of justice and a sustainable peace.

Pax Christi International's advocacy extends to international fora, where it represents the global Catholic peace movement and collaborates with other faith-based and civil society organizations. Holding consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO since 1979 and participating in the Council of Europe and EU consultations, we elevate local Palestinian and Israeli voices for a just peace to the global stage. This ensures that decisions affecting the region are informed by those living the realities of the conflict. In 2025, Pax Christi International, Parents Circle–Families Forum, and Action for the Mediterranean representatives met with King Philippe of Belgium to highlight the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and urge principled international action. A month later, in his speech on the occasion of the National Day of Belgium, he recalled that meeting and became the first king to define the situation in Gaza as "a shame for humanity." Collaborations with other networks, such as the Global Solidarity for Peace in Palestine Coalition, and initiatives like the "Embracing Our Faith" campaign, encourage religious leaders across Europe to advocate for ceasefires, humanitarian access, and the protection of holy sites.

Central to the mission of Pax Christi International is the principle of integral human disarmament, a vision championed by Pope Francis and reaffirmed by Pope Leo XIV in 2025. Integral disarmament calls not only for the dismantling of weapons but also for disarming hearts, economies, and relationships, redirecting resources from conflict toward reconciliation, education, and healing.

The Just Peace in the Holy Land Working Group awarding the Parents Circle – Families Forum.



Reflecting on the ongoing situation in Palestine, Pax Christi International has stated that the occupation, dispossession, and profound human suffering endured by Palestinians are unacceptable, calling for urgent and lasting action. We unequivocally call for an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire and insist that all hostages must be released without delay. We condemn measures that restrict humanitarian aid, including Israel's May 6, 2025, NGO registration rules, and call for unrestricted access to relief and the protection of holy sites under neutral status.

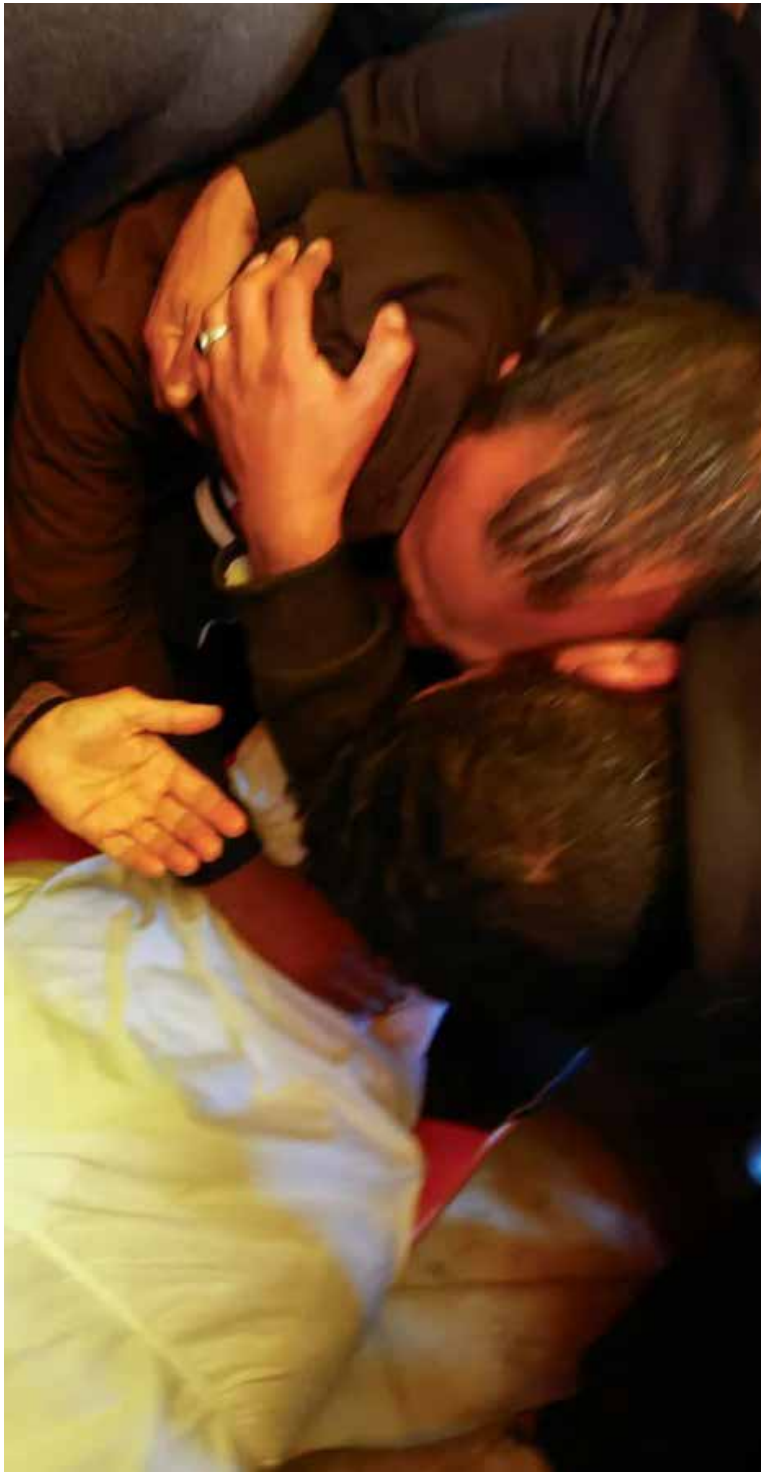


One of the PCI delegations in Palestine, meeting with Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah, former president of Pax Christi International.

A just and negotiated political settlement is central to our vision. We advocate for the recognition of the State of Palestine, the end of illegal settlements, adherence to international law, and enforcement mechanisms that guarantee accountability and uphold the dignity and rights of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Through decades of pilgrimage, advocacy, coalition-building, and global solidarity actions, including peaceful demonstrations, nonviolent vigils, and circles of prayer, Pax Christi International exemplifies the careful, sustained work required for meaningful peacebuilding. In every part of the world, the movement seeks not only to witness the possibility of nonviolence but to provide concrete evidence that it is the most effective approach to achieving justice, reconciliation, and a lasting peace. To us, solidarity isn't charity, it is a principled commitment to walk alongside communities, amplify their voices, and support the conditions for genuine dialogue and hope.

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Justice for Palestine Begins with Justice for Its Girls

Courtesy of UNFPA

"I wish I could go back home and feel safe with my family. I miss clean water, good food, and living in Gaza without war," said Aya, 15, displaced with her family to a camp in Khan Younis after their home was destroyed. This was not the first time. Aya has been displaced more than five times since the war began. Each forced evacuation came under bombs, forcing her to leave behind her belongings, schoolbooks, and fragments of her childhood. Her words capture the painful reality for adolescent girls in Palestine: a generation growing up under siege and violence, their childhoods interrupted, their rights denied.

Occupation, blockade, displacement, and violence dictate where adolescent girls live, whether they learn, and even whether they survive. Their days are shaped by forces beyond their control, stripping away the stability and opportunities every young person deserves. The universal rights of girls to safety, education, health, dignity, and a future are systematically undermined, leaving a generation to navigate adolescence under fear and loss.

More than half a million adolescent girls across Palestine are growing up amid constant uncertainty, violence, and deprivation. Overcrowded shelters, often makeshift tents along streets or the seashore, strip away safety and privacy; clean water and food are scarce; and the risk of gender-based violence rises sharply. Most schools have been destroyed, with the few remaining converted into shelters, cutting off education for hundreds of thousands. Early marriage is increasingly seen by families as a desperate coping and protection mechanism.

In Gaza, adolescent girls lack access to menstrual hygiene and sexual and reproductive health services, leaving them to manage the natural changes of adolescence in unsafe, undignified conditions. Trauma is a daily companion, with airstrikes and constant fear of violence leaving deep emotional scars. In the West Bank, movement restrictions, checkpoints, and settler violence prevent many girls from safely reaching school or health services, and harassment or intimidation is a common experience. Each of these crises is not only a humanitarian concern but a violation of rights. Every girl denied her basic rights, every girl exposed to violence, every girl stripped of dignity is a reminder of the cost of injustice.

When adolescent girls speak of their lives, their words carry both anguish and resilience. One girl in Gaza, forced to manage her period without pads or privacy, whispered, "Every time my period comes, I wish I wasn't a girl." This cry reveals how war erodes dignity. In the West Bank, a 15-year-old explained how checkpoints often keep her from reaching school: "I wake up ready to learn, but soldiers decide if today I can be a student." These voices reflect a generation navigating relentless barriers to live normally, yet still holding on to the dream of a life where their rights are respected and their futures are their own.

The struggles of adolescent girls in Palestine cannot be separated from the broader fight for women's rights and justice. Their lives reveal a gendered reality of conflict where girls are not only exposed to the same violence as everyone else, but also face unique burdens because of their age and gender. Early marriage, harassment in shelters, silencing of their voices, and the stripping away of dignity are daily reminders that

Adolescent girls take part in recreational activities at a UNFPA-supported youth hub in Gaza. Photo ©UNFPA/SDF.





In Gaza, UNFPA Girls' Tents provide safe spaces where adolescent girls access education, health, and support – giving them the tools and confidence to shape their futures. Photo ©UNFPA/YPEER.

global commitments to protect women and girls have too often failed to become real protection or change.

And yet, adolescent girls are not only victims. Many are stepping forward as leaders, peer educators, and volunteers in their communities. They create safe spaces for other girls, share knowledge about health and protection, and offer solidarity where systems fail. Their courage calls on the world to do more than issue statements of concern. It demands recognition, resources, and accountability so the rights of Palestinian girls are not an afterthought but a cornerstone of justice.

UNFPA has placed adolescent girls at the heart of its humanitarian response in Palestine, recognizing that their needs and rights require dedicated attention. In Gaza, seven youth hubs and Girls' Tents have been established to provide safe girl-centered spaces where thousands of adolescents access life skills education, comprehensive life education, sexual and reproductive health information, psychosocial support, and leadership training. These interventions are designed not only to meet immediate needs but also to give girls the tools and confidence to protect themselves and to participate in their communities. In the West Bank, three dedicated girl-centered spaces and mobile health clinics ensure that adolescents are not cut off from critical services. These facilities integrate adolescent- and youth-friendly responsive services and comprehensive life education, while also providing safe environments where girls can seek counseling and connect with peers.

UNFPA has distributed more than 8,000 adolescent kits across Palestine. These kits are tailored to support adolescent girls and boys affected by conflict, providing essential hygiene supplies, educational materials, and protection tools that help adolescents maintain dignity, safety, and hope in conditions where these are stripped away.

UNFPA also prioritizes adolescent girls' leadership and agency. Through networks such as Y-PEER and the Youth Advisory Panel, girls lead awareness campaigns, peer education, and advocacy. Volunteer-run learning points keep displaced girls connected to education and health information, while youth-led initiatives offer safe spaces for self-expression, skills-building, and solidarity.

This work has been made possible with support from donors including the Government of Estonia, the Government of the United Kingdom, the Government of Canada, the Government of Sweden, the Government of Norway, the Government of Chile, and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), whose contributions help ensure that adolescent girls in Palestine can access the protection, health, and dignity they deserve.

Adolescent girls in Palestine embody resilience in the face of relentless hardship. Yet resilience should never be demanded of children. What they deserve is justice, dignity, and the full protection of their rights. World leaders must act now. Every day that Palestinian girls are denied safety, education, and dignity is a failure of justice. Upholding their rights is not a choice – it is a moral obligation and a legal duty.

Yasmine, like many adolescents in Gaza, has been deprived of education and basic rights. With limited access to food, medical care, or even clean water, she spends her days playing with her toys amid the war. Photo ©UNFPA/Media Clinic.



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Refusing to Be Silenced

Challenging Europe's Architecture of Repressing Palestine Solidarity

ELSC
European Legal Support Center

Courtesy of the European Legal Support Center

On Christmas Eve 2024, Arsenal FC dismissed Mark Bonnik, a 61-year-old kitman, following a smear campaign by Zionist groups. His dismissal was for tweeting against genocide and in solidarity with Palestine. Instead of defending their staff's right to free speech and to oppose genocide, Arsenal submitted to pressure.

Dima (pseudonym) is a Palestinian Jordanian, a mother, and a skilled worker who in Germany was separated from her one-year-old after German authorities deemed the child a "security threat." She then realized it was she who was investigated by the infamous security services for Palestine solidarity.

Filmmaker Dror Dayan faces a trial for denouncing on X the criminalization of the slogan "From the river to the see, Palestine will be free."

Nouraldin Alsweirki, a Palestinian employee in the Netherlands, was fired by the software company Speakap B.V. over LinkedIn posts in which he supported the right of the Palestinian people to resist the Zionist settler-colonial occupation.

The same happened to Mohamad S., a Lebanese marketing professional who was working as a senior media testing manager at Zalando SE (an online fashion retailer) in Berlin. He received a termination of his contract following his expression of solidarity with Palestine.

These cases – Mark, Dima, Nouraldin, Mohamad, Palestine Action, Urgence Palestine, Samidoun – are not aberrations. They are the visible edge of a vast system of repression. They are only the tip of the iceberg.

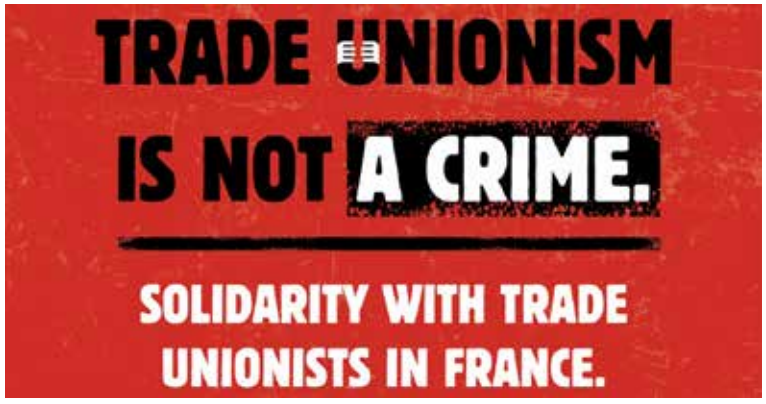
Similar repression also reaches campuses. Across Europe, events have been cancelled, student sit-ins banned, and symbols of solidarity with the Palestinian people prohibited. Universities have become laboratories for securitization. At Leiden University's The Hague Campus, this dynamic is especially clear. Freedom of Information documents (FOIA) reveal that the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) collaborated with university administrators to monitor Palestine solidarity activism as an "existential threat." The university closed the campus citing vague "security risks," later deploying undercover guards, mandatory ID checks, and visitor codes, transforming the academic space from a space of debate and critical thought into surveillance zones.

Police brutal crackdown on protestors in the streets of Berlin, Paris, Rome, and others found their justification in a mainstream media narrative that stripped the demonstrators of their moral agency and dehumanized them.

The repression of solidarity with Palestinians has moved from targeting individuals to targeting groups and collectives.

What started with individuals soon extended to entire communities, collectives, and organizations. Authorities in Europe are not only going after lone voices, they are also systematically trying to dismantle collective efforts and networks that sustain resistance. And when the cynical weaponization of antisemitism failed to achieve its goals, the authorities defaulted to their predicted tactic: "anti-terrorism" laws, a trend we identify across Europe and the UK. In the





UK, Palestine Action faces criminalization for direct action against arms companies complicit in the Israeli genocide in Gaza. In France, Urgence Palestine is targeted under counter-terror frameworks; Germany has banned Samidoun. Belgium and Italy are escalating measures that could pave the way for future proscriptions.

The strategy is clear: Governments across Europe deploy vague legislation and "anti-terror" laws to fragment the Palestine solidarity networks. By labelling Palestine solidarity groups "extremist" or "terrorist," states complicit in the genocide aim to isolate these groups from the rest of the movement and reduce their legitimacy.

Europe's architecture of repression entails the targeting of individuals and the proscription of groups; the firing of employees and police crackdowns; the weaponization of antisemitism and the enactment of draconian anti-terror laws. This architecture forms a pillar in a triangle of Europe's complicity in Israel's genocide in Gaza.

The repression of Palestine solidarity did not start in October 2023. Since 2019, the ELSC has monitored and documented thousands of cases of repression across Europe and Britain. But this repression has escalated sharply in response to the solidarity movement's growth – a natural moral reaction to a live-streamed genocide. The scale is staggering. In Germany alone, we have made public 766 cases since 2019 through our "Index of Repression," a continuously updated database that tracks these incidents. Similar indexes will be published for other countries in the EU and for Britian. Germany is neither unique nor exceptional.

This repression manifests across all sectors: academia, public institutions, media, finance, culture, education, employment, immigration, and more. No place is exempt from the machinery of silencing. Each tactic they use, serves the same purpose: to isolate, exhaust, and intimidate those who speak against genocide. Repression, in short, is the ruling class's primary tactic to silence dissent against its policies.

Consider Europe's complicity in Israel's genocide in Gaza as a triangle. The first pillar is material support, including arms exports and financial aid. The second is political support, which provides diplomatic cover for Israel's crimes by justifying and legitimizing them. But these two pillars can't stand without a third: the systematic silencing of internal dissent. Without suppressing opposition at home, political and material support for genocide becomes impossible.

"Western democracy" has a clearly defined limit: you are free to speak only until you challenge the ruling class and its vested colonial and geopolitical interests. The moment you do, the facade of tolerance vanishes, and the machinery of repression is unleashed. This repression is the product of coordinated networks that involve government institutions, corporate entities, media platforms, and advocacy and lawfare groups.

Such repression, however, is not new. What we are currently witnessing in Europe is the culmination of a decades-long attempt by authorities and institutions to conflate the Palestinian identity and solidarity with terrorism and antisemitism. An Orwellian strategy is employed to portray the Other as a barbaric threat and the Self as the paragon of moral security. The language used by European media, politicians, and police to justify Palestine solidarity repression is designed to prevent any divergence from colonial mainstream narratives. As part of this strategy, we see enormous efforts by European politicians and mainstream media echoing the "us versus them" and "civilized versus uncivilized" dichotomy of 9/11.

But the Palestine solidarity movement is fighting back because as long as – and wherever – there is oppression, there will be resistance. This fight is not so much about saving so-called liberal Western democracies but rather about defending those who oppose genocide and seek accountability.

Through our work, the ELSC defends and empowers the movement, enabling it to continue speaking out against genocide and the complicity that enables it. We expose these acts not as isolated cases but as part of a systematic, colonial-rooted policy of silencing dissent. A policy that seeks to crush opposition by denying support and exhausting the movement with bureaucracy, tremendous legal fees, and personal retaliation. This is exactly what we confront.

PRESS RELEASE Shocking levels of state violence and repressionin Germany: Palästinal Solidaritat Duisburg and Samidoun



We recognize legal victories as vital for individuals and significant for the movement and the collective struggle. In Dima's case, we appealed, and the court ruled that the child, separated for months from the mother, must be allowed to reenter Germany. Nouraldin won his case after being unjustly fired. We have a case against Arsenal for Mark's dismissal.

We cannot defend everyone, as the scale of repression exceeds any single organization's capacity. But by creating crucial legal precedents, we hope to deter perpetuators of repression and, simultaneously, let targets of repression know that they are not alone and that – equally important – they can fight back.

In the last two years, we have seen a massive movement that is defined by its moral clarity and its refusal to be intimidated. On the streets of European cities, we have witnessed the most brutal police suppression week after week: broken hands, bleeding faces, head injuries, and throats suffocating under police arms. And yet, the people have refused to be intimidated, continuing to take to the streets every single week for two years. This movement has made it possible to reach a point where protesting Israel's participation in Eurovision, UEFA is no longer a taboo; that a demand to impose sanctions and boycotts on Israel is no longer the topic of marginalized leftists. This movement's voices and actions are leading to the isolation of the Zionist entity on every single front, no matter the repression.

Understanding the limits of the law – especially within racist, anti-immigration, anti-Arab, anti-people of color, and anti-working class regimes and systems – we know that appealing to the implementation of laws is not the salvation. Rather, we see it as one strategy among many to expose and challenge these systems. Through strategic legal actions we seek to protect the movement's capacity to continue to speak out, demand an end to genocide, disrupt complicity, and refuse submission to repression.

We must always remind ourselves that this is not about saving "liberal democracies." It is about defending the people who oppose genocide and seek accountability, ensuring that they are not smashed and silenced. For years to come, we need to remain steadfast; this is not going to end soon. The worst could be still ahead of us, as per Israel's genocidal and colonial plans. And while regimes have built an architecture of repression, we must continue to build an architecture of resistance. The legal front is only one pillar of this architecture.

The European Legal Support Center (ELSC) is the first and only independent organization defending and empowering the Palestine solidarity movement across Europe through legal means, providing free legal advice and assistance to associations, human rights NGOs, and groups and individuals advocating for Palestine in mainland Europe and Britain.

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A Culture Can Never Be Replaced

How Archaeology Is Being Used to Erase Palestinian Existence



By Marie-Louise Winbladh

Having served for almost 40 years as a senior curator at the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, Sweden, I have been in charge of the most important collections of Cypriot antiquities in the world outside Cyprus. These collections, comprising 12,000 artifacts, were excavated by Swedish archaeologists more than a century ago, and their efforts still inspire admiration and respect. This involvement led to my interest in the preservation of ancient artifacts and cultural heritage. Cyprus has always been a melting pot at the crossroads of civilizations between Asia, Africa, and Europe. The island is located just a stone's throw from the Levantine coast where the civilization of Palestine has flourished ever since the Bronze Age. While I was studying the extensive contacts and cultural exchange that have existed between Cyprus and its neighbors, particularly the Gaza Strip, my focus fell on the archaeology of Palestine.

While the irreplaceable cultural heritage in Northern Cyprus is in many cases in a state of total decay, this is in no way comparable to Gaza, where most of the heritage, including museums with unique artifacts, has been destroyed. Historical buildings, excavations, and other ancient sites in Palestine have been targeted, while archaeology has been used to promote Israel's territorial expansion and justify land expropriation, as finds connected to Jewish history are used to support territorial and political claims whereas those connected to other cultures are at best neglected and at worst irrevocably destroyed.

In January 2025, the World Monuments Fund included Gaza on the list of 25 historic sites under threat. Long before the recent war in Gaza, the political situation in Palestine made it impossible for archaeologists to work or even protect their cultural heritage in the most basic way.

Historically, colonial and nationalistic archaeology has profoundly influenced the cultural heritage of countries in the eastern Mediterranean region. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, archaeology in Palestine was practiced mostly by Western foreigners who focused on what they considered important to investigate based on their perspective. While political intentions were in general behind foreign archaeological expeditions, excavations carried out during the late Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate focused on findings that were considered important in relation to Christian teachings. In excavations carried out by the State of Israel in the territories it controlled prior to the 1967 occupation of the West Bank, finds from non-biblical periods were practically ignored, and proper scientific excavation reports are missing.[1] Such procedures would be unthinkable during a normal excavation. Swedish archaeologists working in Cyprus more than a hundred years ago introduced methods of documentation that were applied to every level of strata and to any kind of artifact, recorded in carefully written notebooks and on photos (more than

Herodian road near the northern end of the Western Wall tunnels, East Jerusalem. The two pillars on the left were part of a colonnaded street that used to run to the west of this road.





Aerial view of Jerusalem's "City of David." The Haram al-Sharif is visible at the top, the Kidron Valley to the right, Silwan at the bottom, and Wadi Hilweh to the left.

10,000 glass negatives). Every find and every excavation were published within a short time despite great financial difficulties. These methods have since been used by archaeologists worldwide. Except in Israel.

Early Israeli archaeology has frequently been considered unprofessional and of questionable integrity. The lack of stratigraphic excavation, the discarding of non-biblical levels, and the looting of archaeological sites are all factors that have contributed to this criticism. In addition, the lack of publication as well as the approval of trade in antiquities have rendered Israeli archaeology different from other excavations in the Middle East. In its early years, Israel had no government institution to oversee antiquities, a situation reminiscent of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Israeli archaeologist Raz Kletter's review of Israeli archaeology from 1948 until 1967 confirms this criticism and illustrates the situation. Kletter has documented the destruction and looting of many archaeological sites by the Israeli military as well as the general failure of Israeli leaders to recognize the existence and foster the preservation of the remnants of other cultures in the region.[2]

Even today, the public prefers the notion of an imagined Holy Land more than the facts offered by archaeologists. The outcome of this has been the erasure and exploitation of other cultures and even humans.

Sadly, the situation seems the same in 2025. Or even worse. Archaeology has been, and continues to be, used by political groups as proof of the superiority of Jewish culture. The modern Jewish state is considered to be linked to ancient Israel to "prove" that the Jewish community existed before the Arab civilization in Israel. As other ethnic groups are considered as inferior citizens, their remains are not considered worth preservation or documentation. Archaeological finds have been deliberately misinterpreted, and myths have been presented as historical facts in ways that are defined as factoids. As German historian Franz Georg Maier explains, "Factoids … are mere speculations or guesses which have been repeated so often that they are eventually taken for hard facts."[3]

The Hebrew Bible contains the likely most famous origin myth, describing both the origin of the human race in general as well as the false narrative of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. Most scholars, led by Israel Finkelstein, have determined that even the existence of Solomon, David, and the First Temple at Jerusalem cannot be proven archaeologically.[4] Many biblical sites, most notably Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, are considered to be more fiction than science.

Since 1967, the Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOFA) in the Israeli Civil Administration manages the cultural resources in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. In yet another unusual procedure, the excavated artifacts have all been stored in the staff officer's storerooms that are mostly located in East Jerusalem. These important finds made by the military archaeologists are not available to non-Israeli scholars, let alone to Palestinian archaeologists. Instead, the artifacts are kept in secret storerooms and occasionally given on loan to foreign museums and research institutes for display.

International law has established that artifacts found in areas A, B, C, or East Jerusalem belong to Palestine, as supported by, among others, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Accords, UN Security Council resolutions, and the 1954 Hague Convention, an international treaty that serves as the framework to protect cultural heritage in times of armed conflict. According to the 1954 Hague Convention, the signatories are obliged to "... prevent the exportation of cultural property from a territory occupied by it during an armed conflict."[5] This treaty bans the removal of cultural artifacts by foreign occupiers; both Israel and Palestine have signed this treaty. Marina Lostal, a professor of international law at The Hague University asserted that Palestine "... could sue Israel for breaching this Protocol before the International Court of Justice. In theory."[6] Patty Gerstenblith, a research professor of law, wrote in 2016, "One who removes an antiquity without permission is a thief, and the antiquities are stolen property."[7]

Great damage has been inflicted on archaeological and historical sites in the Palestinian areas since 1967. Military bombing and grenade attacks from Israel have caused destruction, and most Palestinian heritage resources remain unprotected. The armed conflict has pursued the erasure of Palestinian cultural identity to construct an Israeli past.

The City of David is an archaeological investigation amongst and underneath the Palestinian Wadi Hilweh neighborhood of Silwan in East Jerusalem. In 2005, the presentation of the findings from the City of David site was surrendered to Elad, a right-wing organization that openly works to oust Palestinians and is funded by tens of millions of dollars, half of it from the United States. It highlights the narrative of the Kingdom of David and its alleged link to the modern Israeli state. The latest discoveries in the City of David are related to the so-called Herodian Road and to the tunnel excavation that is expanding below Silwan. Much of the archaeological activity is carried out underground, involving a network of tunnels and spaces. These excavations are now conducted under



Anthropoid sarcophagi from Deir al-Balah in Gaza, thirteenth century BC, on display at the Israel Museum.

the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority and are considered the most controversial activities. Tunneling as a method of excavating is seen as unscientific, making it impossible to distinguish the levels between the strata at the site.

Israel is a signatory to the UNESCO Convention on World Heritage Sites, which prohibits harm to heritage sites even in times of war. But Palestinian, Israeli, and international archaeologists have documented the damages to Palestinian archaeological or heritage sites using Israeli military force.[8] And while Israel is either destroying or illegally appropriating Palestinian heritage, Israeli law prevents Palestinian authorities from exploring and safeguarding this heritage. As a result most Palestinian heritage resources are left unprotected and have been looted and plundered.

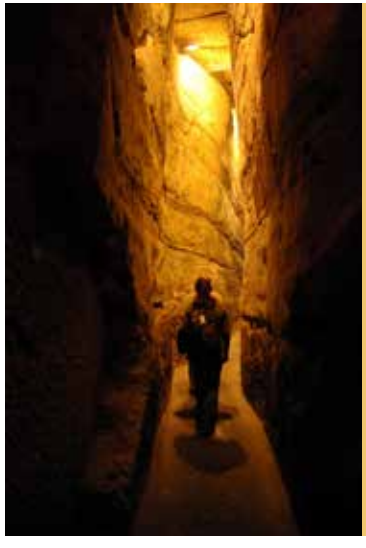
As Israel is using archaeology to promote its religious and political nationalist aims, Western-influenced biblical archaeology remains of enormous importance, with evident political, cultural, and religious implications. Biblical archaeologists argue that all other evidence must be adjusted to the biblical narrative that they consider a reliable historical source. Despite available science-based archaeology, the influence of religion and politics on any major excavation remains largely unchanged. As Christian Zionists and evangelical Christians in the United States – political allies of Israel since 1967 – provide support for the Israeli regime and are subsidizing biblical archaeology and Jewish settlers, right-wing Christian archaeologists from the United States are provided by Israel with excavation permits even though they frequently lack proper qualifications. Evangelical Christians (Protestants) believe that the return of the Jewish people to its "ancestral homeland," that is, the West Bank, is the necessary forerunner of the return of the Messiah. In the United States, the evangelicals are a quarter of the nation's population. Biblical archaeology has thus become an ultra-religious American specialty, marked by fraud and pseudo research.

Settlement construction and expansion is another tool in the arsenal of Israeli measures to illegally appropriate heritage sites on Palestinian land. In this context it is noteworthy that all Israeli settlements in the West Bank are considered illegal according to international law (Article 49 of the Geneva Convention) and as reiterated in UN resolutions[9] and in a statement from the United Nations.[10] However, Israel ignores international conventions and not only evicts Palestinians from their lands but also seizes Palestinian cultural heritage sites to build Zionist settlements. Numerous military orders have been issued by Israel to facilitate the government's seizure of occupied lands in the West Bank under the pretext of protecting and developing them.[11] Archaeological as well as cultural and natural heritage sites, such as Khirbet Silun (Tell Shiloh), Susia, Khirbet al-Mazra`a (Tell Amona), and others, have been handed over to the settlement councils.

In 2024, Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich confirmed that a new Jewish settlement, called Nahal Heletz, would be established near the Palestinian village of Battir, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the occupied West Bank. After examination, UNESCO in 2014 inscribed the entire area on the List of World Heritage in Danger.[12] More recently, the Israeli army has declared 63 Palestinian archaeological sites in the West Bank as "Israeli" heritage sites, among them the site that is integral to the Palestinian village of Sebastia.[13] As early as in 2023, it was reported that a new Israeli settlement at Sebastia in the West Bank would cause heavy damage to the historical site near the Palestinian village, as Israel approved the investment of NIS 29 million (US$8 million) to develop the Sebastia site in order to allow more settlers to reach the area and reduce Palestinians' access to it.[14]

Other destructive activities, not least from a scientific perspective, carried out by Jewish settlers in the West Bank include illegal excavations conducted by individuals without proper academic qualifications or knowledge. Gush Emunim is an ultra-nationalist fundamentalist movement that promotes archaeology and settlements in the West Bank. The group conducts excavations at Khirbet Seilun Shilo, an archaeological site on private Palestinian land. In 2017, a team of right-wing evangelical Christian "archaeologists" from the United States participated in the "excavations." The group has not published any findings but backs the Israeli view that a Jewish settlement was first before all others in the region. Khirbet Seilun Shilo is now one of the largest settlements in the West Bank and has expanded to

The Western Wall tunnel beneath the Palestinian village of Silwan, East Jerusalem.



a whole town on the hilltop, heavily guarded by a fence all around the Iron Age site of Shiloh.[15] Archaeology and religion have been exploited to construct the Israeli state and still play a crucial role in justifying Israel's territorial demands, violations of international law, and curtailing of Palestinian rights. Religion is widely used as a means to insist on a supposed continuity with ancient Israel. The country claims to be the conqueror of Palestine under the protection of God, who they believe gave them possession of the land. Religiously backed nationalistic perceptions have thus transformed archaeology and land confiscation since the establishment of the State of Israel.

Scholars today believe that archaeologists have an important role and need to take a more ethically responsible approach to the politics of the region. If a country is deprived of its cultural heritage, the picture of its history becomes incomplete, and the people loses part of its identity. The use of archaeology as a weapon and the destruction of artifacts and remains that are considered irrelevant by an occupying culture are effective ways to wipe out a suppressed culture since these artifacts can never be



The lid of an anthropoid sarcophagus from Deir al-Balah in Gaza, thirteenth century BC, on display at the Israel Museum.

to become an efficient political tool. In Palestine, archaeology has deep colonial roots, which is a heritage from the British Mandate period between 1920 and 1948. The country has been at the center of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interests for millennia illustrated by the rich archaeological, historical, and religious heritage. However, the importance of a rich cultural heritage is seriously undermined by occupation replaced. While all research concerning the past is influenced by politics and contemporary perspectives, it is of great importance that archaeologists take an active stand against the political misuse of the field. Through nationalism, archaeology has been exploited by far-right movements and political parties that provide false narratives of a great past while claiming ownership of heritage.

Marie-Louise Winbladh is an archaeologist, writer, and researcher who for more than 35 years served as curator at the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities (Medelhavsmuseet) in Stockholm and senior curator of the Cyprus Collections, the most important collections in the world outside Cyprus. Her books deal with archaeology, history, and religion on Cyprus and Crete. She is also a member of the Danish-Greek-Swedish Excavations at Chaniá in western Crete, and responsible for the publication of groups of finds. For more information, please visit http://cypernochkreta.dinstudio.se.

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Ceasefire

By Ahmed Masoud

When they announce the ceasefire
I want to see your smile again,
I miss it.
When they announce it,
I will collapse.
The plasters on my wounds are worn out.
When the fighting stops
and the sound of tanks slows down,
we will hear the sound of our tears again.
Then, I will start to mourn my brother
my country, my people, my Jabalia Camp.
But for one moment, I will smile too and sigh.
Just before my grieving starts



Ahmed Masoud is an award-winning Palestinian author living the UK. His first novels, Vanished: The Mysterious Disappearance of Mustafa Ouda *and* Come What May *have received critical acclaim and have been translated into several languages. Ahmed is also a playwright and poet who has recently received praise by the UK's leading theater critics in the* Guardian.



Archaeology as a Weapon

Long-Lasting Legacies of Colonialism and Nationalism in Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Palestine

By Marie-Louise Winbladh

Paperback, EUR 75, Published by Vernon Press, 2025

Series in Heritage Studies

Available from the publisher and via Amazon. *TWiP* readers interested in purchasing the book are welcome to use the discount code CFC152286340E that entitles holders to a 24 percent discount on purchases via the Vernon Press website.

This book contains reflections on the link between archaeology and nationalism in Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Palestine, including the effects of colonialism. These countries have something in common – the reconstruction of the past through archaeology in order to claim territories and strengthen modern national identity.

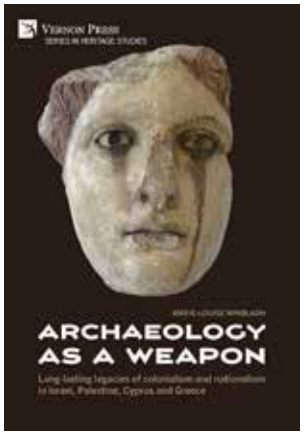
In Cyprus, the Greek-Cypriot community has always invoked the ancient Greek past and emphasized the difference between themselves and the "oriental" Turkish-speaking Cypriots. Greek heritage has been used to claim ancestral rights to a land they believe was colonized by the Greeks thousands of years before the arrival of the first Ottoman Turks which still impacts on how they perceive and treat their Turkish-speaking compatriots. Moreover, the museums of both communities are still projecting a cultural policy that is influenced by the political situation.

Gaza, limestone head, possibly 2500 BC.



Destroyed mosque in Rafah, Gaza.





In Israel, archaeology and religion have been exploited to construct the Israeli state and still play a crucial role in justifying Israel's territorial demands, as religion is widely used as a means to insist on a supposed continuity with ancient Israel. The country claims to be the conqueror of Palestine under the protection of God, who they believe gave them possession of the land. Nationalistic perceptions have transformed archaeology into an efficient political tool. The country has been at the center of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interests for millennia, as illustrated by the rich archaeological, historical, and religious heritage. However, the importance of a rich cultural heritage is seriously undermined by the occupation and land confiscation since the establishment of the State of Israel.

Scholars today believe that archaeologists have an important role and need to take a more ethically responsible approach to the politics of the region. All research concerning the past is influenced by politics and contemporary perspectives, and it is of great importance that archaeologists take an active stand against the political misuse of the field.

Hazar Kaba, an associate professor at the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Science and Letters, Sinop University, Turkey, praises the book, stating, *Archaeology as a Weapon* is a compelling critique of the intersection between archaeology, politics, and cultural identity. Exploring the lasting effects of colonialism and nationalism in Israel, Palestine, Greece, and Cyprus, the book reveals how historical and archaeological narratives are shaped, manipulated, and sometimes weaponized. […] the overall text, with meticulous research and a sharp analytical approach, challenges conventional perspectives and calls for a more ethical and decolonized approach to the study of the past."



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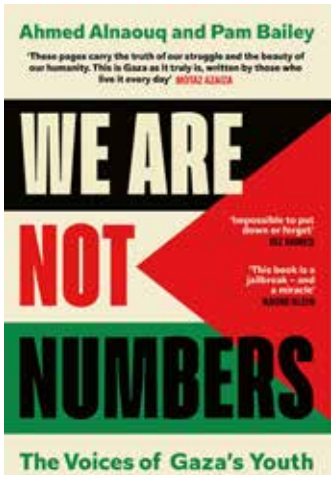
A teenage girl stares at her roof, hoping it won't collapse over her head. A young student searches the internet for photos of libraries around the world, hoping he'll be able to visit them one day. Another walks around the city taking notes of all the buildings she dreams of repairing.

These are the stories of young people from Gaza, born under Israeli occupation and blockade. They are people who have endured unspeakable struggles and losses, who keep fighting to be recognized not as numbers, but as human beings with hopes, dreams, and lives worth living.

We Are Not Numbers was founded in 2014 to give voice to the youth of Gaza. In this collection – vital, urgent, and full of heart, spanning over ten years to the present moment – we gain an unparalleled insight into the past, as well as the current and next generation of Palestinian leaders, artists, scientists, and scholars and imagine where we might go from here.

Ahmed, the co-editor of this collection was the inspiration for, and original project manager of, We Are Not Numbers. He grew up in Gaza, where he earned a bachelor's degree in English literature from Al-Azhar University. He then won the UK's prestigious Chevening scholarship and earned a master's degree in international journalism from Leeds University. Ahmed also serves as advocacy and outreach officer for the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, and his writings have been published by *Gulf News*, *New Arab*, and other websites. He is currently based in London.

Pam Bailey is a freelance journalist and social-justice activist. She lived and worked in the Gaza Strip immediately following the 2008/9 Israeli assault. Today, she is a communications consultant and writer/editor for nonprofits such as ImpACT International for Human Rights Policies. She has also founded More Than Our Crimes, a nonprofit initiative focused on assuring second chances for individuals convicted of violent crimes in the United States. She is based in Washington, DC.



Praise for *We Are Not Numbers*

Ta-Nehisi Coates called this book "Essential . . . A project that insists on liberation."

Mohammed el-Kurd praised it "A rebellion against the singular story. An insightful, multifaceted glimpse into the besieged Gaza Strip, where millions of people continue to confront a genocide waged by an Israeli regime." And *Naomi Klein* commented, "With lovingly crafted words and stories, the authors in *We Are Not Numbers* open portals in Israel's apartheid wall, inviting readers into the impossible realities of life under siege in Gaza. The collective commitment to doing whatever it takes to produce this extraordinary symphony of testimony is evident on every page. This book is a jailbreak – and a miracle." *Moataz Azaiza*, the award-winning Palestinian photojournalist from Gaza explained, "*We Are Not Numbers* is not just a book – it's my life, their life, and our shared story. I know some of these brave writers; I've walked the same streets, felt the same fear, and shared the same dreams under Gaza's skies. These pages carry the truth of our struggle and the beauty of our humanity. This is Gaza as it truly is, written by those who live it every day." And *Kamila Shamsie* wrote, "Picking up this book may seem hard because of the subject matter; putting it down is even harder. The voices of Gaza's young writers are so moving and varied and astonishing. You'll carry *We Are Not Numbers* in your heart for a very long time."



SCAN
TO SHARE



Reimagining Folktales, Reclaiming Identity

The Art of Reem

Palestinian artist Reem Al-Natsheh has long turned to the power of stories to shape her artistic journey. Her paintings, deeply inspired by Palestinian folktales, weave together imagination, collective memory, and lived experience to create a visual language that speaks both to the past and to the current reality in Palestine.

Palestinian art-lovers or fans can find her work at the Palestinian Artists' Consortium Website, where they can see how Reem turns Palestinian traditional folktales into paintings. These folktales passed down through generations are cultural and political metaphors that reveal the fabric of Palestinian identity. "The folktale is a reflection of people's cumulative culture," she explains. "It embodies the national character, imagination, and resilience of our people." In her work, Reem reinterprets these oral traditions by visually reconstructing their characters and narratives in an abstract way. She describes her style as "naïve and primitive art in a contemporary dialogue," where childlike wonder and historical depth converge.

One of her most striking inspirations is the tale of *Nos Nsais*, the small but extraordinary child born from a magical apple. In Reem's retelling, this character embodies resistance against oppression, transforming from a folkloric hero into a metaphor for the Palestinian struggle for justice. The magical apple, she suggests, symbolizes the possibility of radical transformation, challenging unjust realities while inspiring liberation.

Beyond storytelling, Reem's work grapples with the profound concepts of *home* and *exile*. Growing up under occupation, with restricted movement and fragmented towns and cities, she internalized a paradoxical sense of belonging and estrangement. "Being in a place doesn't always mean truly being there," she reflects. This paradox continues to shape her exploration of homeland and exile, where memory, geography, and personal experience intersect. Her art transforms the idea of home into both a dreamscape and a metaphor – a space where resilience, nostalgia, and transformation coexist.

The themes of displacement, resistance, and identity are central to her visual language. Reem uses abstraction and layering to express the tension of these experiences. Characters in her paintings often appear suspended, fragmented, or in metamorphosis, reflecting the fragile yet persistent nature of identity under displacement. "The layering



process," she explains, "is a testimony of identity – never fixed, always evolving." In some works, earlier layers resist disappearance, while in others they merge, mirroring how collective and personal histories coexist in Palestinian life.

Her artistic evolution has also been shaped by political realities. From witnessing the second Intifada to the ongoing wars on Gaza, Reem has experienced the deep imprints of violence and dispossession. She recalls soldiers invading her school and neighborhood, and how, as a child, she mistook these intrusions for normal life. With time, she understood them as dehumanizing acts – experiences that now underpin the urgency of her art.



Yet, amid pain, Reem insists on the necessity of hope. "Hope and pain are intertwined," she says. "If art leans too much on hope, it risks becoming detached from reality; if it dwells only on pain, it risks despair. My challenge is to balance the two."

For Reem, resistance is both sacred and multifaceted – political, cultural, personal. Art, she believes, is a vital form of cultural resistance: a way of challenging dominant narratives, sustaining collective identity, and inspiring resilience. While it may not directly alter power structures, it ensures that the stories of her people continue to be told, remembered, and reimagined.

Through her brush, Reem transforms folktales into living testaments of survival, creativity, and defiance. In doing so, she reminds us that stories – like art – can resist erasure and nurture the hope for liberation.



SCAN
TO SHARE

Palestinians Have Won This Battle

Let's recap. Had the project of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, which included an eastern maritime route from India to the Arabian Peninsula, a GCC-wide railway network, and a northern corridor through Jordan and Israel to Europe, in addition to a normalization of relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Israel, seen the light of day, the question of Palestine would have vanished into oblivion and the Palestinians would have become today's Native Americans.

Irrespective of your stand regarding the October 7 al-Aqsa Flood, the issue of Palestine has now taken center stage worldwide. As a direct result of the grotesque retaliatory actions of Israel, millions of people flooded the streets across the world calling for an end to the genocide and showing support for the Palestinians. "Free, free Palestine" has become every single demonstration's main slogan, and the Palestinian flag has become the image of the oppressed throughout the world. Furthermore, the world's protests against the genocide have challenged existing, decades-old international resolutions put forward to protect the people of the world by exposing the world's double standards. What is still happening is essentially an international earthquake.

I pray that the ceasefire now in effect will still be holding as we take this issue to print. My worry is that since Israel did not achieve its declared goals – even after twenty-four months of war – it might try again. In the meantime, Gazans can take a break from the 2,000-ton bombs, seeing their loved ones killed, drone attacks, the roar of Israeli reconnaissance drones, known locally as *al-zanana*, explosive robots, the bombing of shelters, schools, mosques, and homes, and everything else that has made their lives hell during the past two years.

As vicious and painful as the attacks on Gaza were, they do not factor into the equation of winning or losing a war. What counts is whether or not you have achieved your goals. Israel has not, but the resistance has. Abu Ibrahim, Yehya Sinwar, said it plainly: "We either force Israel to implement UN resolutions, withdraw from the occupied territories, and accept a Palestinian state, or we will isolate it internationally." Just about every poll conducted indicates that Israel has lost the battle of public opinion not only in Europe and the Global South, but in the US too. In fact, analysts insist that the souring of public opinion in the US, and hence the risk of losing the upcoming mid-term elections, is the number one reason why President Trump effectively forced Netanyahu to accept a ceasefire. We all know that Israel will try to weasel its way out and do whatever it can to achieve its main goal, which is to expel Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. But I believe that the time for that has passed, and if there had ever been an opportunity to push the Gazans into Egypt, Israel clearly missed that opportunity.

The war is not over, but the Palestinians have at least won this battle.

Long Live Palestine

Sani Meo
Publisher



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Bashar Abdel Hadi
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Nicky Smith
Carole Issel
David Miller
Rebecca Hamid

Their contribution has not only made this publication possible but also strengthened the voice of Palestine that is being deliberately suppressed.

EXHIBITION

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The cross-point of Palestinian Identities



An exhibition on ceremonial clothes embroidered by Palestinian women between 1870 and 1950

20 November 2025
to 10 January 2026

Museums of San Salvatore in Lauro
Rome

An exhibition organized by

THIS WEEK IN Palestine