

South African solidarity needed against a relentless apartheid regime: Support Palestinian struggle for liberation.

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“There has been many experiences of massacres for the people of Palestine at the hands of Israel and children are the biggest target; my young children have lived through two massacres”, said Haidar Eid. “Gaza is the largest open-air prison. The struggle of Palestinians against oppression is not new, we have been besieged by Apartheid Israeli and its military force for 50 years. Palestine pleads with Post - Apartheid South Africa to fight in solidarity with us for our liberation.

Eid was on a visit to South Africa with his partner, Rifka Al-Amya, an intersectional feminist activist and they visited Khanya College at the House of Movements on 2 February 2023. Eid is a professor at Al Aqsa university in where he teaches literature including ‘I Write What I Like’ by Steve Biko.

The effect of Israel’s occupation of the Gaza strip is immensely devastating. Families are not able to see each other; 97% of their water is undrinkable and they have to buy water to survive. Gaza is known as the largest ‘open air prison’. Eid talked about daily life in Gaza where Palestinians are restricted from many things and under a strict blockade. They are not allowed to import milk, books, crayons, construction materials and other essentials like medicine. Palestinians are not allowed freedom of movement. For example, Eid said, “My sister lives in Bethlehem but I haven’t seen her since 2000.” Palestinians also don’t enjoy the ‘right of return’ and are prevented from returning to their villages.

There are about 2.4 million people in Gaza, living in a 360 square/kilometre area; and 80% of Gazans are refugees and live in 8 refugee camps. According to the United Nations (UN), at least 62% (over a million) of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are in need of food assistance. The UN predicts that conditions are so bad that Gaza will not be liveable by 2030.

Historically Arabs and Jews have lived together in Palestine. But since the early days, the ideology of Zionism has been to promote the fallacy of Palestine as “a land without a people for a people without a land.” Zionism is the historical movement that was built for the exclusive protection of people of Jewish origin, at the exclusion of all others. Hence today, people of Jewish origin can migrate to live in Israel from anywhere in the world, but Palestinians are not allowed to return to live in their villages in present day Israel. There is a view that Israel is committing an incremental ethnic cleansing of the land, appropriating symbols of Palestinian culture, displacing the Palestinians by Israeli settlers, some of whom are very recent visitors to the Middle east itself.

In spite of their daily life dotted with violence, Palestinians continue to resist. There are arts and culture movements; intellectuals; journalists; schooling; and other activist movements mobilizing for social justice. Both Eid and Al-Amya agree that the solution is not the partition of the land along ethno-linguistic and religious lines. This has not worked, and Israel continues to bombard, occupy and oppress Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. They propose a one-state solution in which both

Israeli's and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews, Muslims, Christians and the myriad of other faiths present in the communities, irrespective of language, enjoy freedom and human rights and are treated the same.

Eid raised the disappointment in Post-Apartheid South Africa for continuing to have economic ties with Israeli, after South African's have themselves experienced apartheid.

"We urge you to heed our call as we heeded your call to the international community in the 1960s for Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanction" said Eid. Since 2005, Palestinian civil society and the Boycott, Disinvest and Sanctions (BDS) has called on the world and especially post-apartheid South Africa to boycott apartheid Israel, disinvest from companies benefiting from the oppression of Palestinians and impose sanctions against Israel.

He reminded Khanya College that during the anti-apartheid struggle, Palestinian liberation movement had an agreement with South African liberation movements and the Saharawi, that whoever "is liberated first will support the struggle of the others." South Africa has not kept this promise.

Al- Almya, who is an activist and writer, shared her experiences of being a woman and a mother living under conditions in Gaza. Al-Amya said that motherhood is difficult and dangerous in Gaza, which is under constant bombardment and the struggle for food. She shared a story of a close friend who was killed while she was preparing milk for her child in the kitchen. "It is my nightmare as a mother," said Al-Amya.

Al-Amya continued, "I believe in intersectionality and justice. I believe that we can't postpone our issues as women for after the liberation of Palestine." For the intersectional activist, the biggest problem facing the feminist movement in Palestine is the fact of funding. Many organisations that are funded by the West are required to steer clear of criticism of Israel and to present women's issues strictly as women's issues, never linking them to problems of class or racism. The mother of two said that a big part of the boycott, divest and sanctions movement against Zionist Israel is the fight against the culture of consumerism which threatens to grip Palestinians. Many of the feminist organisations in the grips of donor agreements promote consumerist thinking to Palestine women.

A suggestion for ordinary South Africans to begin to support Palestine in their struggle for liberation they should boycott the Israel rugby team that will be coming to South Africa to play. This being the first step in solidarity to assist Palestine in their struggle acknowledging the links of apartheid history between Palestine and South Africa.

In spite of such daily life dotted with violence, Palestinians continue to resist. There are arts and culture movements; cultural workers, intellectuals, journalists; and other activist movements mobilising for the liberation of Palestine.

When asked about the forms of resistance used by the Palestinians living in Gaza, Eid said that the fact that Palestinians continue to "exist, to love and to make love," was the most important form of resistance.

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