

CHALLENGING THE NARRATIVE

The Obstacles of Advocating for Palestinian Rights



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PALESTINIAN RETURN CENTRE

Organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2015



The **Palestinian Return Centre** is an independent consultancy focusing on the historical, political and legal aspects of the Palestinian Refugees. The organization offers expert advice to various actors and agencies on the question of Palestinian Refugees within the context of the Nakba - the catastrophe following the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948 - and serves as an information repository on other related aspects of the Palestine question and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It specializes in the research, analysis, and monitor of issues pertaining to the dispersed Palestinians and their internationally recognized legal right to return.

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PREFACE

The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) & Labour Friends of Palestine & the Middle East (LFPME) hosted a seminar at the House of Commons on 24th February 2016. The event focused on the obstacles Palestinian advocates face when criticising Israel and its policies. The discussion looked at how the Palestinian narrative is distorted in order to depreciate efficacy and obstruct the peace process. It also discussed anti-Semitism and how Israel is employing it as a tool to silence its critics.

The event was hosted by Grahame Morris MP, Labour Friends of Palestine & the Middle East (LFPME) and chaired by Sameh Habeeb, Head of Media and PR at the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC).

SPEAKERS

Chair of the event: **Sameh Habeeb**, Head of Media and PR at Palestinian Return Centre (PRC)

Jonathan Rosenhead, Chair of British Committee for Universities of Palestine

Kamel Hawwash, British-Palestinian Professor & Vice-Chair of Palestinian Solidarity Campaign

Leah Levane, Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJfP)

Peter Tatchell, International Human Rights Campaigner and Director of the Peter Tatchell Foundation



BIOGRAPHIES

Sameh Habeeb is the Head of Media and PR at Palestinian Return Centre (PRC). Sameh has worked as a journalist in the Gaza Strip during Operation Cast Lead, and from 2011 to 2015 he also led PRC's successful application for the United Nations NGO consultative status.

Jonathan Rosenhead is Emeritus Professor of Operational Research at the London School of Economics, and has been President of the British Operational Research Society. Formerly Chair of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, he is currently Chair of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine, and an active member of the Artists for Palestine UK collective.

Kamel Hawwash is a British-Palestinian engineering Professor based at the University of Birmingham. He is a longstanding campaigner for justice, especially for the Palestinian people. He is Vice Chair of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and a columnist for the Middle East Monitor and Middle East Eye. He also runs a blog on the Palestinian injustice called Brum2Jerusalem.

Leah Levane is a member of the Executive Board of Jews for Justice for Palestinians and spent 3 months working in the South Hebron Hills as part of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). Now semi retired, she predominantly works with local communities, focusing on addressing racism and highlighting shared interests amongst different social groups.

Peter Tatchell has campaigned for human rights and LGBT freedom for 49 years. He was the defeated Labour candidate in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election – the dirtiest, most violent election in Britain for 100 years. He is Director the Peter Tatchell Foundation and has been a supporter of the Palestinian case for over 40 years. He last spoke in November 2015 in support of BDS at the Oxford Union.



SPEECHES

INTRODUCTION

Sameh Habeeb is the Head of Media and PR at the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) and chair of the seminar. He introduced the event

Good evening and welcome to this event, organized by the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC). We are happy and delighted to have all of you today to discuss this crucial matter. This event is hosted by Grahame Morris, MP and organized in partnership with Labour Friends of Palestine & the Middle East (LFPME). We are gathered to discuss the obstacles and challenges facing the Palestinian advocates when criticizing Israel and speaking out against the atrocities perpetrated by Israelis day after day in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). We have a good panel today to cover many issues in regard to this crucial topic. I'll be first introducing the speakers and then say a few words before moving on to the speakers, Prof. Jonathan, Prof. Kamel, and then Leah, and Peter.

The seminar focuses on the obstacles facing Palestinian advocates when criticizing Israel and its policies. They are often accused of being anti-Semites, self-hating Jews, racists, anti-democracy, and the list goes on and on. Apparently, the size of the solidarity with the Palestinian people has tremendously increased over the last, at least, one decade due to the BDS, which has made a significant role in informing the public opinion, here, in Europe, or elsewhere in the world, where Israel and its policies towards the Palestinians became exposed. The 5th Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism held in occupied Jerusalem in 2015 put a number of recommendations to be used by Israeli politicians, think-tank organisations, governmental bodies across Europe, even Latin America, China, and wherever and whenever it's possible to resist the BDS movement. So, some of the conclusions and recommendations or the action plan that came up from this forum is to emphasize the Jewish consensus that the BDS is anti-Semitic.

The Forum provided an action plan for the pro Israeli organisations and individuals to enable them to counter the BDS. The 2015 fifth Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism Action plan included going on the offensive by: Emphasize the Jewish consensus that BDS is anti-Semitic.

Need to address the narratives of the BDS movement – Apartheid, occupation, settlements, and human rights.

We need to reassert the legitimacy of Israel's founding as a state for the Jewish people.

Expose connections between the BDS movement and anti-Semitism.

In Europe, labelling someone as anti-Semitic isn't always effective.

Some BDS supporters are progressives, and exposing them to how the BDS campaign can harm Palestinians might persuade them to withdraw their support.

We need to find creative ways to show it is possible to help Palestinians and advance the peace process without affiliating with the Israel deniers.

Have visitors meet with Palestinian workers in Israeli companies in the territories who oppose BDS because they fear for their livelihood.

Intensify the focus on coalition building; do not take for granted that liberal progressives cannot become allies.

We need to work at the grassroots level as opposed to only to higher ups.

Naming and shaming anti-Israel organizations and funders.

The BDS people are more loosely linked and they work very hard to cover their tracks. We need to analyze

The above are some of recommendations to fight BDS and pro Palestinian human rights campaigners by employing anti-Semitism as a tool. We've seen a lot of propaganda videos recently how the BDS is affecting or having effects on the lives of Palestinians. We've seen some of the propaganda documentaries, even from the Israeli side, going to the factories, showing Palestinian labourers, celebrating and having fun with their Israeli bosses in a mechanism to whitewash the Israeli crimes against the Palestinians, to distort the BDS.

So Israel will continue to fail in resisting the BDS due to its occupation and war crimes perpetrated on a daily basis in the Occupied Territories. Such human rights violations will help the growth of BDS across the world.

So we have a distinguished panel for tonight. Professor Jonathan Rosenhead will be speaking about the limits to public discussion of Palestinian issues, academically and in the media. He will be telling you about the bias, and I'm sure most of us are aware of the bias with sources or by pressure from the Israeli lobby, which is being very effective, and so many Israeli organisations are trying to pressure the media and divide them from sound coverage. Professor Rosenhead is Emeritus Professor of Operational Research at the London School of Economics, and has been President of the British Operational Research Society. Formerly Chair of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, he is currently the Chair of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine, and an active member of the Artists for Palestine UK collective.

Also we have Prof. Kamel Hawwash. He will be speaking about Palestinians and how they have the right to challenge Israel's propaganda without fear, because everyone is having a sort of self-censorship right now towards what they say and how they say it in fear that they will be accused of being anti-Semitic, although we are Palestinians, and he will be telling you, we are the Semite people. He is a British-Palestinian engineering Professor based at the University of Birmingham. He is a longstanding campaigner for justice, especially for the Palestinian people. He is Vice Chair of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and a columnist for the Middle East Monitor and Middle East Eye.

He also runs a blog on the Palestinian injustice called Brum2Jerusalem.

Also we have Leah Levane, she will be answering the question, is Israel speaking on behalf of the entire Jewish people? She is a member of the Executive Board of Jews for Justice for Palestinians and spent 3 months working in the South Hebron Hills as part of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). Now semi retired, she predominantly works with local communities, focusing on addressing racism and highlighting shared interests amongst different social groups.

Finally, we have Peter Tatchell. He will be talking about how Israel uses claims of anti-Semitism to silence campaigners of Palestinian rights. Mr. Tatchell has campaigned for human rights and LGBT freedom for 49 years. He was the defeated Labour candidate in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election. He is Director of the Peter Tatchell Foundation and has been a supporter of the Palestinian case for so many decades. He has recently been in a debate at Oxford University with Prof. Alan Dershowitz and I advise you to watch this debate, it's nearly one hour, and I can tell you that Mr. Tatchell has managed to deconstruct the Israeli narrative presented at the time by Dershowitz. Without any further introductions, I would like to give the floor to Prof. Rosenhead.

The limits to public discussion of Palestinian issues, academically and in the media

Jonathan Rosenhead discussed the limits to public discussion of Palestinian issues, academically and in the media. In these discussions, criticism of the Israeli government is wrongly portrayed as anti-Semitism. Palestinians, he said, are selectively misrepresented in the media and there is no adequate pressure to correct the bias reporting that has taken place. Moreover, there is currently an emphasis on what he called "lawfare approach to Palestinian advocacy", with states in the US, Canada, and the UK trying to officially condemn BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) as an offense.

I was amused to hear the account of what the Israelis think about our movement. This 'covering our tracks skillfully', etc. Every two or three years they announce an investigation to where we get our money from and they allocate millions to this investigation. We could tell them simply that we don't have any, but they wouldn't believe us. This is extraordinary; they think they are confronted with a multinational integrated enterprise, which is very skilful, instead of lots of activists doing what they know best. I'm going to talk particularly about the focus on the cultural and academic boycott, the difficulty in getting that reported fairly, because that's what I know most about.

We are of course, still sort of free to advocate on behalf of Palestine. Well, that is if you are not Muslim, in which case the Prevent programme might get you. There was a case of a 15-year old school boy who was reported to the police for wearing a Free Palestine badge, for example. We are sort of free to

advocate for Palestinian rights, as long as you are not actually advocating for anything that would work, like the BDS, so they're bringing in, as you know, rules to stop locally-elected politicians from advocating or practising boycott. Trying to get yourself into the media is like treacle. It can be done, but it's very hard work. The one exception is almost everything we do gets reported in the Jewish Chronicle. So we make sure to send them all our press releases because it's the one place we can be sure they will print them out. I think it's because they like frightening their readers. There are breakthroughs into the mainstream media and we obviously work quite hard to get there. For example, when the very decent, honourable man, Stephen Hawking decided not to, after all, as we with other people had suggested, that he wouldn't go to the conference in Palestine, that made international news and it was the one most remarked on success of the BDS movement. There are things which they have to concede and report, but mostly they manage to avoid it.

Let's consider the BBC. They are directing their behaviour the way they do because they are deeply prejudiced against Palestine. They do it because they are swamped regularly by pro-Israel advocates who contact them if there is the slightest indication that they might deviate and say something favourable about Palestine, the Palestinians, or the need for Israel to change its policies. And therefore they are extraordinarily careful. They are not so careful on the other side. So then we have case like Sarah Montague on the Today programme was twice found to have erred even by the BBC complaints procedure, once when she was interviewing Moshe Ya'alon, who is the Defence Minister for Israel, and gave him an easy time. For example, when he said, "What is all the fuss about, the Palestinians have their independent state", and she didn't correct him. That sort of thing. And then there was the case with a man called Eado Hecht, who she introduced as an independent defence analyst and he teaches at Bar-Ilan University and consults for the Israeli government. So there were those things that swept through; John Humphrys managed to make a mistake when reporting the recent violence in the West Bank and in Jerusalem when he said that he 'implied' that all the deaths had been Israelis, whereas we actually know that it's 5 to 1 Palestinians killed for every Israeli. So there are occasions in which even the BBC complaints procedure picks up things because they are so extraordinary, but there is no adequate counterbalanced pressure for correction where Palestine is misrepresented. Not that people don't try, but the emphases that megaphone from Israel which supplies messages to the telephones, mobile phones of their signed-up supporters is very powerful. I've had questions to me read off their mobile phones by somebody who had received it from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Israel.

I brought with me to exhibit an article from the Guardian, so nowhere is safe from these interphones. This was a report by a journalist called Mark Tran, "Head of Labour inquiry into anti-Semitic intimidations by Oxford students." This was last week, some of you may have seen it. "The Oxford University Labour club decided to support Israeli apartheid week," which is of course this week, so it's very current. A Vice-Chair resigned saying that the place, the Labour club and Labour Party too, was shot through with anti-Semitism. Who did they go and

ask to see if this was true. They asked Louise Ellman and reported her. She is the vice-Chair of Labour Friends of Israel. They asked James Mann, who is a well-known pro-Zionist, we'll come to him again when we come to something called the EUMC definition of anti-Semitism. So they didn't go to anybody who might have rebutted this extraordinary story that the Labour Party is shot through with anti-Semitism and of course the Labour Party just fell over. They appointed a committee to inquire into it and the last Labour leader said it was disgraceful, and so on. Ellman, I should mention, defended in 2004 the Israeli assassination of Sheikh Yassin, spiritual leader of Hamas. In 2011 on Newsnight, she said that Hamas was sending children with suicide belts to kill Israelis, children, although there had been suicide bombings before, they hadn't been going on for quite a long time. This was just simply not picked up on.

The process of selectively misrepresenting the Palestinian case is international. Even the name in the United States is called the Palestine exception to free speech and this is drawn in US campuses. I'll give you an example from the cultural boycott area. The Oscars take place on Sunday. You may have read a good story about the swag bags that all principal Oscar nominees get. This contains a VIP breast enhancement and a sex toy but only for female nominees and a walking tour of Japan and a \$55,000 dollars, allegedly worth, 10-day 5-star hotel trip to Israel. This made quite a lot of fuss. We are combining with people in the US, in Italy, in Israel, in Palestine to publicise this. Just one of the aspects of this is a very nice advert, which was being constructed, headed "Free Trip to Israel at the Expense of Palestinians". This was to be taken out in full page of Variety magazine this week, because Variety Magazine is what actors and people in the film industry read, they accepted it and then they cancelled it. Currently, they're collecting money to see if they can get it into the LA Times, but the Variety magazine which censored this advertisement had previously taken on the advertisement of somebody with the following headline: "Why does Obama administration treat Israel like a punching bag?" with the picture of a punching bag. So it's not that Israel-Palestine is a sensitive issue, because they'll take the money for the Zionists but they will not take any support for the Palestinian case.



I'd like to give you another exhibit. This is the definition of anti-Semitism, it's called the EUMC working definition of anti-Semitism. EUMC stands for European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. Now that's a very long definition for something as simple as anti-Semitism. You can summarise anti-Semitism in a sentence of about 10 words, you know, it's discrimination and incitement of hatred against Jews as Jews. It's not a problem, everybody recognise it when they see it. This is being defined by the EUMC. I should say that it was only a working definition. The EUMC was folded into another organisation, who then decided they wanted nothing to do with it. The definition was written by a guy called Ken Stern, who works for the American Jewish Committee and it gave this very lengthy definition in order to confuse the issue, in order to be able to put down the bottom of a list of things that might be cited as evidence of anti-Semitism. Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of the State of Israel is a racist endeavour, applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation, etc. They gave people ammunition and this has been used; in my Union, University College Union, they used this definition against one of my colleagues and I was his friend who went into the tribunal. The guy who was doing it was citing all these things of evidence that this guy had been posting things which were anti-Semitic. The whole thing was thrown out and subsequently the UCU decided it would never use again this definition. But the State Department uses it and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe uses it despite the fact that it's been disassembled by its parent body.

This is just one aspect of the way Israel behaves. I'm going to run through what the current emphasis is, which is what's been called 'lawfare'. There is now a lawfare approach to combating Palestinian advocacy. I heard this first when I was in Palestine last year, from Omar Barghouti, who is a key figure in the boycott movement. He said this was the new emphasis and I didn't know how he could know but he was certainly aware. As of now, only 1 year later, 22 different states in the US have passed or are processing legislation to make advocacy of BDS in



some way an offense. Canadian Parliament this week passed a resolution to that effect condemning BDS. The UK has, in the last few weeks, promoted the idea that it would become illegal for public bodies and universities, perhaps Students Unions, to in any way discriminate against Israeli firms, and this is only the first step because they're going to move on to pension funds and trade unions. This is the new democracy. The UK policy was announced by Matthew Hancock in Jerusalem. It was very appropriate for this policy to be announced in Jerusalem because it was invented in Jerusalem. This is an Israeli policy.

Anti-Semitism is always a key part of these moves but it does need human agency to propagate it. It is perhaps fortunate or not entirely accidental that our institutions are permeated with people who will spread these ideas around. In the US, we know something about AIPAC, the primary body of the Israeli lobby thanks to the book by Mearsheimer and Walt. There is no British equivalent to, there is a British equivalent to the Israeli lobby, but there is no equivalent to Mearsheimer and Walt and that is a lack.

The Tricycle Theatre asked the Jewish Film Festival not to take any money from the Israeli embassy. This was at the height of the attack on Gaza in August 2014. Sajid Javid, who was then the Culture Secretary, replied to a critic saying that he shouldn't have weighed in against them, which he did, against the Tricycle, and he said, "This department has kept closely in touch with the Israeli Ambassador throughout these events." And then goes on to say, "The department shall continue to challenge anti-Semitism at every opportunity." There was no anti-Semitism. There was anti-Israeli, but these things are conflated so often. Behind the scenes, and I cannot cite you the chapter and verse although I have the chapter and verse because this is information given to me in confidence, but Javid called in Indhu Rubasingham, who is the Artistic Director of the Tricycle Theatre, and was told that if Tricycle doesn't withdraw the request to the Jewish Film Festival to forego the Israeli funding, Tricycle would lose all its Arts Council funding. As entirely inappropriate because that's not the way funding should be done, but the threat coming from the Ministry is not something that easy to ignore. We can go on the same line, when Southampton University had the temerity to advertise a conference, proper academic conference organised by two of its professors, one Palestinian, one Israeli, on the subject of international law and the State of Israel. Eric Pickles went public saying "This is a one-sided diatribe"; Michael Gove said, "it was not a conference; it was an anti-Israel hate fest." These people are playing on an anti-Semitic trope in their attempts to get these things cancelled. There was another university, which I'm not allowed to name, which was going to do something similar and the vice-Chancellor received a call from David Cameron himself asking him not to do it. That vice-Chancellor stood up to the pressure, but you can understand how people don't.

Just to conclude, Peter Osborne, very celebrated journalist, in 2009 had a Dispatches programme on Channel 4, called "The Zionist Lobby in the UK." That is a start on the process that we need. We need the Mearsheimer and Walt in the UK and we need it soon. Thank you.

Palestinians have the right to challenge Israeli propaganda without fear

Kamel Hawwash discussed how Israeli propaganda attempts to turn the struggle in Palestine into a religious conflict. However, the truth is that any population has the right to resist their oppressors. He affirmed, "We, Palestinians, didn't choose our occupiers; the occupier chose their homeland," in order to clarify that Palestinians are not fighting against the Jewish people because of their identity, but they are resisting the occupation of their lands by Israel and would be doing so whatever the identity of the occupier was. There is a difference between "acts of terror" and "acts of resistance".

Thank you very much, Sameh, and thank you to the PRC and LFPME for organising this. Before I get into my section, I just wanted to follow up from Jonathan, on the definition of anti-Semitism. Something that slipped through the news is the fact that when Tony Blair, who was the Middle East envoy, is now working for the European Council for Tolerance and Reconciliation. David Cronin, who is a well-known journalist who works in Brussels, described the group, he says, "While its name might give the impression that it's a dispassionate intergovernmental body, the ECTR is an initiative of the Zionist zealot and fertilizer tycoon Moshe Kantor," which means that they will be producing an anti-Semitism definition soon, so we must be ware that that could happen.

Now to my part, I want to start by saying that I speak today in a personal capacity. I work at the University of Birmingham, I'm vice-Chair of PSC but I want to be careful in that some of the things we are talking about are purely from a Palestinian perspective may not be representative of what this organisation says. I came down from Birmingham today and I thought on the tube that I didn't start with a very good omen. Because sat opposite me was Melanie Phillips, I kid you not. But actually that was quite useful, because that is what we are sometimes up against, members of the British establishment, and she's seen as a worldly person to have on Question Time repeatedly. If anyone is a hate speaker, she is. If anybody hates Palestinians, she does. And if anybody hates Muslims, she does. But this woman is a celebrated member of the establishment. And that's the sort of thing that we are up against. Have you ever seen a Palestinian, linked to Palestine, on Question Time? No. Of course you see George Galloway and others who are sympathetic to Palestinians, but not in that way.

Now, I want to start with a quote. "How long will this humiliation and shame last? For how long? Do we stay silent? Do we stay humiliated? Is there a room for peaceful methods? In law, yes there is room in the law. You have the full right to defend yourself by any means against someone wielding a weapon in your face. The resistance is within the limits of the law and is legitimate". "As I see it - in a separate posting - the Third Intifada started. What is happening to Al-Aqsa is what is happening to all our sacred places and what is happening to the women of Al-Aqsa is what is happening to our mothers and sisters. I

do not think that people can accept the humiliation, that people will rise and they are rising.” Now, this was posted on Facebook by Muhannad Halabi, one of the first people, the martyrs in the current intifada in October. Now, I call him a martyr because I’m speaking from a Palestinian perspective. I don’t care what the Israelis call him, they want to call him a terrorist? That’s up to them. And that’s the kind of difference, if you like, in attitude. He was killed by an Israeli soldier; to us he is a martyr. He might have committed an act which people find unacceptable, that is up to them. So I say that very clearly. Actually, I consider what he did an act of revenge for what the Israeli occupation does to the Palestinians. So it’s an act of revenge. If the occupation wasn’t there, he wouldn’t be doing what he did. But an extremely disturbing feature of the recent clashes is what seems a deliberate framing by Israel of the reasons behind the knife-attacks, as simply hatred of Jews, because they are Jews. This is what they are trying to frame it as. Reference to casualties has not been to Israelis but to Jews. The claim is that we, Palestinians, raise our children to hate Jews and that even the Head of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas incites against Jews. He couldn’t incite a mosquito to sting someone if it was on their arm. And they accuse him of incitement.

The context of the nearly 50-year occupation is deliberately omitted. In fact, as far as a number of Israeli politicians is concerned, there is no occupation. They actually flatly deny there is an occupation and the committee decided there was no occupation. In another Israeli instance at the UN, Israel’s new ambassador Danny Danon held up a diagram of the human body, entitled “How to stab a Jew” again the emphasis is that Palestinians hate Jews. Last year, Israel’s Prime Minister, Netanyahu, attempted to blame the worst mass murder in history, the Nazi Holocaust, on the Palestinians. He claimed that Hitler only intended to expel the Jews. But, the Grand Mufti and his infamous meeting with him, suggested that he burns the Jews. Suggested that he burns the Jews. And he did it! He listened to the Mufti. If the Mufti said that, he did it. The point is that the Mufti was very concerned about mass migration to his homeland; anyone hears any similarities with current worries of mass migration? People suddenly close up and they don’t want people to come to their countries who they haven’t invited? Whatever he was saying, that’s what he was thinking about.

Notice that Israel will not call the current uprising or rise, an Intifada. They are according to Israel “acts of terror”. That’s really important to them. Is there a way to demonising the Palestinians, that they just hate Jews. No other reason than that. Netanyahu even claimed that, “It isn’t the illegal settlements or Al-Aqsa mosque and what’s happening there, it is very much, they are attacking us, not because they want peace or don’t want peace - he said - it’s because they don’t want us, Jews, here in Israel.” Again that strong emphasis. So you can summarise this as, from Netanyahu, the Palestinians hate us because we are Jews and that the Grand Mufti convinced Hitler to exterminate the Jews rather than expel them. This was a dangerous attempt to turn the struggle into a religious one. In terms of the Grand Mufti, what Netanyahu claims was dispelled by lots of historians. He was very much concerned about this

migration against the will of the indigenous people. Let's not forget that. We were there, as Palestinians. We were there. Christians, Jews, and Muslims, we were there. But it was the decision by this foreign entity, the Zionist movement, to take our land that started the problems that we have now.

So, we Palestinians did not choose our occupier. What I mean by that is that the occupier chose our homeland. That's really quite significant. If Palestine was occupied by the Japanese, our problem would be with the Japanese. If it was occupied by the Mexicans, our problem would be with the Mexicans. We had no choice. When young kids woke up in the morning to find people fighting and killing; killing the families, the men in the house and kicking them out, they saw Zionists doing it. We didn't choose that. But that is who came to our land and took it and expelled 750,000 people. So that's quite important. Now, just for people to understand why we have a right to resist and how the Palestinians do it. The Zionists wanted a homeland somewhere and it is said they were offered Uganda. So picture this and follow it with me. If they had been given Uganda, and Kampala declared the capital of the Zionist entity, how would the Ugandans have felt? Would they have accepted it? Would they have reason against it? I think they wouldn't have done and we could have had a lot of violence from the Ugandans trying to expel those who came to their homes. I have no doubt that would have happen. But equally, if Japan had occupied Palestine, and Israel was created in Uganda, would the Palestinians have created Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad to go and fight them in Uganda? Or the Japanese in Palestine? It's clear. And that is why we have to be confident as Palestinians to say, we know who occupies us. If they just left us alone, we'd get on with them, but we didn't choose them. People try to be really careful about choosing words, can you say Jew, can you say Israeli Jew, can you say Zionist. Well, we know that not all Zionists are Jews and not all Jews are Zionists. So that is the sort of area that we as Palestinians try to manoeuvre in explaining what happened to us.

In fact, I suggested once that Lord Balfour, coming up to 1917 commemorations, promised Palestine to the Zionists; he had more right to promise them Wales. Why didn't him promise them Wales? How would the Welsh have felt? If he had facilitated the creation of a Jewish homeland in Wales, that Cardiff was the united capital for eternity for Israel in Wales. That there was a siege on Wrexham that lasted forever, and people said, "Well, it's because the bloody Welsh were flying rockets!" This is what we face as Palestinians in trying to get our narrative across about the occupation that we face, which we didn't choose. We didn't choose the people who occupied us. And of course, the narrative exempts them further because anything we do to resist is considered 'terror'. And picture this. So, if a man goes and attacks an Israeli soldier in the West Bank, Israel says that's a terrorist act. No, it isn't. The Israeli soldier is an illegal occupier in an illegally occupied piece of land and we have the right to resist. 80% of the attacks that happened since the start of the Intifada in October were in the West Bank and Occupied East Jerusalem. That is an occupation and the Palestinians have a right to resist, as Muhannad Halabi himself said, international law says that that is possible.



But it goes beyond that. If the Palestinians go to join UNESCO, that is called 'political terror'. Did you hear that? That is what they call it, 'political terror'. BDS is 'economic terror' and I think, Palestinians having sex might be thought of as 'demographic terror'. That's what we face. That is the area we are operating in and trying to get across. Guys, it's been 50 years since the occupation started. What we get is, you can't do anything. You can just have the Bil'in weekly thing, that's alright. It's got off the news. But you can't really resist. And you can't ask people to help you. The BDS movement, that we heard about, you can't, you're not allowed to, because that is anti-Semitic. The posters on the underground a couple of days ago, immediately one of the Israeli politicians came out and said, "That is anti-Semitic". Why is it anti-Semitic? Anti-Israeli, yes. And bloody good job they did by putting up these notices and what they said was factually correct. It's a bit like people saying the BDS is anti-Semitic. It's important to face this and think about the three demands they make. And every time an MP says to you, it's anti-Semitic, ask them, "What is it demanding?" Because they don't know. End of the occupation started in 1967. Legal and moral. Number one. Equality for citizens who are Israeli citizens, Palestinians and Jews. Moral and legal. Respect for the right of return of the Palestinian people to their homeland. Moral and legal. How can it be anti-Semitic? End the occupation, there will be no BDS and we will live happily ever after once there is a process of reconciliation. Thank you very much.

Is Israel speaking on behalf of the entire Jewish people?

Leah Levane discussed Israel's claims of speaking for all Jewish people. However, there are numerous groups of Jews both within Israel and around the world who are against the discriminatory policies of Israel against the Palestinians. The Jewish values, including the principle of welcoming a stranger, are not reflected in Israel's oppression against the Palestinians. She concluded that under international law, Israel's occupation has to follow the rules set out in the Geneva Conventions. Therefore, there is no justification for the ill-treatment of Palestinians and other illegal practices by Israel.

Thank you for inviting us to participate. I could just give a very short speech and say, No, and we could move on to the next speaker. It's clearly, evidently, not the case that Israel speaks for all Jews. The problem is that they claim to. It claims to speak for all of us. It's clearly arrogant and nonsense and I think it's at the base of some of the anti-Semitism that does exist; we shouldn't deny that it does exist. But this claim to speak for all of us is one of the reasons that Jews for Justice for Palestinians, organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace in the US, some European organizations in other European countries, it's one reason why got set up. And I want to be very clear that, with all the due respect, we are not any different from any other activist for Palestine. We don't have a special place. People like having us on platforms; we are very happy to speak, but you don't need us to have your voices heard. It is really important that you are clear where anti-Semitism exists, as Jonathan said, the definition is very clear. We should recognise it exists. Sometimes, sadly, it does exist in our movement and I'm proud to have seen organisations in this country and Palestinian leaders be extremely clear that there is no room for any form of racism in our movement. As far as I'm concerned, that should be the end of the story. But as we've heard, sadly, it isn't. I also left my notes home, so I've been scribbling. I hope I won't be too over the place.

People want to have Jewish speakers because they think it creates balance. Well, if you have people like me speaking, the Zionist organisations will not consider that balance, because I am considered, after all, a "self-hating Jew". Because if you're not anti-Semitic, you must be a self-hating Jew. You know, there is nothing else you could be as a Jewish person. The claim they make carries a lot of weight. Peter is going to speak in much more detail about this. It carries weight with the media, with Western politicians, and even with some fair-minded people who haven't had time or the inclination to go into things in the sort of detail that many people here and I'm sure the other panellists have. And it also carries weight because we have to be honest, it does not in any way speak for all the Jewish people, but the majority of Jewish people throughout the world would still identify with Israel, would still claim that Israel, still believe that Israel is a hugely important factor in their life although some of the surveys on that, when I've answered the surveys, well I have to say Israel is an important factor in my life because I spend lots of my energy campaigning against what it's doing. However, it is changing, it is changing far too slowly but is it changing. Organisation s such as ours are growing in

numbers, Jewish Voice for Peace in America, the nature of the size; they have as many Jewish people living in the US as live in Israel. We are quite tiny in this country, it's about 300,000 or something. And they have chapters growing all over the country that are doing very audacious things. Enormous growth there, after the most recent onslaught on Gaza. We now have over 2,000 signatories, that's people who are willing to put their names on the line to say, we don't like it. As a proportion of the small number of Jewish people in this country, it's quite high.

In most recent surveys, you might have seen these come out in the last couple of weeks saying that only a minority of the young Jewish people in this country and in the US consider Israel as a democratic country, consider it's a country committed to peace or committed to equality. The rose-tainted glasses are coming off. Quite a funny example. First of all, after the Charlie Hebdo and the supermarket attacks just over a year ago in Paris, and all these leaders like Netanyahu to say nothing of the Saudi Arabia, who was flogging bloggers; when Netanyahu went into a French synagogue and said, "you are not safe here, you need to move to Israel", they were outraged, they stood up and sang the Marseillaise. I can give many examples of organisations in this country and in Israel and there is a wide range, so you've got organisations like Breaking the Silence, Rabbis for Human Rights, Israeli based organisations, which absolutely believe in the existence of a Jewish state, but are absolutely appalled what's going on and put themselves literally on the line at demonstrations and protecting shepherds and olive growers and so on. But even in Israel you've got organisations such as Anarchists Against the Wall and Taayush (Coexistence), who really have given up on any ideas that there can be a democratic and Jewish state. The very best that anyone else would get is second-class citizenship and who wants that and as we well know what the Palestinians are experiencing is a long way from second-class citizenship. I can think of lots and lots of examples, but I think that's so important to say. Peter is going to speak about how anti-Semitism is used in public discourse, so I don't want to go into too much detail.

We believe in BDS, we as Jews for Justice for Palestinians have a fairly focused policy around that and again within our organisation there is a wide spectrum from people who are committed to boycotting everything that has to do with Israel, to those who only want to boycott settlement products. Our general policy is about boycotting settlement products, anything that profits from the occupation, and businesses profiting from the oppression of the Palestinians, particularly the Bedouin citizens of Israel. The Board of Deputies of British Jews love to say anti-Semitism at the slightest, slightest hint of anything that doesn't say Netanyahu is absolutely wonderful, and everything he does is in self-defence. It's clearly nonsense. And they expect that all Jews support it, so they are very frightened, they are very worried about the growing BDS movement and about the growing Jewish opposition to what they are doing. What I do want to say about anti-Semitism seems no surprise given that the Israeli government says it speaks for all of us and then carries out atrocious acts; it's not a surprise then, if sometimes, attacks happen to Jewish communities institutions because we're being told to take on all the responsibility, we're

told that we are responsible as the Israeli government. I have no vote on who gets into the Israeli government. It's completely understandable, it may be wrong footed but it's completely understandable.

I don't believe it's anti-Semitic to express our disgust at what Israel is doing, the dreadful treatment of Palestinians. We need to remind us that sometimes I speak, and I've got very little time, like today, but it's a very different sort of context, and I just list the sorts of things that are going on for Palestinians: imprisonment, administrative detention, child arrest, house demolitions, destruction of the water systems; that I saw with my own eyes, I saw with my own eyes and I still couldn't believe it was happening. There are many examples, destroying roads, which were not roads but just paths, Palestinians removing stones from paths so that trucks didn't get destroyed when they drove over them.

One of my questions is, is this a Jewish value? Is it Jewish values to be whatever they are, you know, it's open to discussion, to be destroying people's livelihoods, denying them rights, and so on. My understanding of Jewish values and I'm not a theologian, so please don't question me on what it says in the Torah, others may know more than me, but certainly the principle of welcoming a stranger is one. Standing up, in terms of our history, recognising that the atrocious longevity and the atrocious results of anti-Semitism over centuries is, you know, you have a choice. All oppressed people have a choice. When you're no longer the oppressed people, you can then oppress the other people, you can be the top dog. Or you can take the knowledge and understanding from your own oppression, from your own people's oppression and you can apply it to other people. You can go, hey, there are black people being oppressed in the US and there are Palestinians being oppressed, there are black people being oppressed in South Africa and historically, Jewish people disproportionately, in terms of their numbers, stood alongside these people. We are not special. Some oppressed people, including many Jewish people, choose to turn from being oppressed to oppressing.

We are not special and we are not chosen. Theologians may disagree with me about that, but I don't know what being chosen means and what it means in the current context. Even theologians will say, yes, we are the chosen people, by an accident of birth in my case. But if we are the chosen people, it doesn't mean we are chosen to oppress people, it means we are chosen to supposedly be a light of the nations. If this is the nation that is supposed to be the light unto nations, well, we don't need to stand to say much more on that.

I'm going to conclude and leave more time for discussion. It is very important to keep any form of racism out of our movement. We are a movement that stands up for oppressed people. We have to root out and educate people about any form of racism in our movement. But you just have to keep remembering that Israel absolutely does not speak for all Jews. This huge tanker of Jewish opinion is gradually slowly turning, but the Palestinians can't wait and should have no need to wait until Jewish people have woken up in greater numbers. It's part of our job to try to increase those numbers, but really Palestinians cannot wait that long until the rest of the Jewish people wake up.

How Israel uses claims of anti-Semitism to silence campaigners for Palestinian rights

Peter Tatchell explained how pro-Israelis accept no criticism of the Israeli government's policies and they turn that criticism into allegations of anti-Semitism. Occupying forces around the world were condemned by the international community, so why should the Israeli occupation be different and stand beyond the standards that are applied all over the world? The systematic targeted campaigns to intimidate campaigners and academics who speak out against the brutality and illegality of the Israeli occupation of Palestine show that Israel wants to close down the debate. It's a great honour to join you here today and I do so as a dreamer. I dream of what could be, I dream of what should be. And I know that what is happening today in Israel and Palestine is not what should be. There's got to be a better, brighter future for all the people of that region. And the precondition for that better, brighter future is of course peace with justice. Which means an end to the occupation. We need to strive and we are striving for a scenario where everyone, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs can live together in peace, harmony and equality, where human rights exist for everyone. That has got to be the goal and for everybody here tonight I'm sure it is the goal. Sadly, we have some people, in fact many people, who do not recognise that, who seem to believe that the arc of history should bend to the Israeli cause. My view is that it's been bending to the Israeli cause for far too long and now it needs to bend the other way to ensure equality and justice and based upon an end to the occupation. Now, like many of you, whenever I do a tweet or a news release or a public statement in support of the Palestinian cause, which I've been in support of since the early 1970s, every single time the charge of anti-Semitism or racism will fly back at me. Even the most innocuous statements, even when I make a statement that is trying to reassure Jewish and Israeli people that they should have security, even then I'm being told that I'm not doing enough to support the Israeli cause.

So I'm trolled almost daily on Twitter by pro-Israelis who, as we've heard, will not accept even the slightest criticism of Israeli policy and seek to consistently turn around that criticism into the allegations of anti-Semitism. One of their charges of course, which you've all probably already heard of, [is that] we're singling out Israel, that we're elevating Israel to higher standards than other countries. Well, I can certainly say that myself and many people I know, we also call out human rights abuses by Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Uganda, the US, Britain, and many other countries. You know, if you look at it, most of the world accepted that the US occupation of Vietnam was wrong, and that people there had a right to resist. Most people accepted that the Ian Smith regime in what was then called Rhodesia was a tyrannical regime that had to be resisted. Most people in the world accepted that the Indonesian occupation of East Timor and still today West Papua is fundamentally wrong and the people there have and had a right to resist. So why should the Israeli occupation be treated differently? Why should it be above and beyond the standards which have applied to every other people resisting occupation?

Of course, as someone in the Gandhian tradition, my own personal view is that resistance should be non-violent, that an eye for an eye leaves us all blind. But I do appreciate the overwhelming force that Israel uses and how that puts the Palestinian people in a very, very difficult, weak position if they exclusively used non-violent resistance. Speaking personally, I condemn all attacks upon civilians, by Israel and by Palestinians. Attacks on civilians are war crimes under international law. The cause of any side is diminished when innocent civilians are killed. Whatever Israel does, it's important that those of us who support the Palestinian cause, do not stoop to their methods and their justifications, that we hold a higher standard, that we defend an ethics, which is principled, universal and based upon human rights for all.

Of course it's also rather bizarre the way in which Israel will so often cite the fact that it is claiming to act in self-defence. Everything it does, even the most excessive attack are justified in the name of self-defence. That is a bit rich coming from the occupier. The occupier, who created this problem, now claims to be acting in self-defence. Unbelievable. And of course, Israel says that its measures are proportionate and you look at the statistics, ten thousands civilians in Gaza, nothing proportionate whatsoever about the Israeli reaction.

Anyway, the argument or the accusation of racism and anti-Semitism is quite clearly a bid to intimidate and silence critics of Israel. They know, very rightly, that no one wants to be accused of anti-Semitism. That's a dreadful thing to be accused of and a dreadful thing to be. They use it cynically as we've heard to try and shut down the debate. And I know for my own experience, there are many people, who are friends of mine or colleagues of mine, who used to be much more vocal against what Israel is doing but because of the targeted campaigns against them with these accusations of anti-Semitism, they have rode back. They haven't stopped speaking out, but they're not as vocal as they used to be because this systematic campaign has really got to them. And that of course in the intention. The intention is to close down the debate and to silence people.

I think that, looking back in the long, long past, in the early 1970s, in 1971, '72 and '73, I was involved, like probably many of you, in the anti-apartheid movement. And one of the tactics which was evolving then was the boycott campaign against South Africa, to boycott and divest in products and other things from the South African regime. I and others, thought at the time, if this tactic can work against South Africa, why not against the Israeli occupation. And I can remember speaking at quite a few events and writing articles. But interestingly, compared to today, there were very few accusations of racism or anti-Semitism. Quite a lot of Jewish and Israeli people did not agree, they disputed it, they argued against, but they didn't accuse us, or only in a very small number of cases, they didn't accuse of being anti-Semitic or racist. That is a new phenomenon. And it is an orchestrated campaign that has been pushed by Israeli government agencies as a way to try and undermine the movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people. And you can see that quite clearly from the few reactions of racism and anti-Semitism 40 years ago compared to today.

As other speakers have said, yes, of course we must guard against anti-Semitism and racism and sadly, on a very small number of cases, I have witnessed it in the Palestinian movement and I deplore that. Not only because it is morally wrong, because it undermines the moral credibility of the Palestinian cause. If there is examples of racism and anti-Semitism, that weakens the cause we love and support. It gives our opponents ammunition to undermine the movement that we seek and support. And I think there are people in Palestine itself, who need to think very carefully about some of the propaganda they're using, which is anti-Semitic and which again, first of all, it is wrong, it is wrong to treat Jewish people in that way and to demonise all Jewish people, but secondly again, it undermines the credibility and moral authority of the great Palestinian cause. It's a great cause; do not diminish it by allowing or acquiescing in anti-Semitism.

Many of you will know that last year I debated Professor Alan Dershowitz on BDS at Oxford Union. If you haven't seen the video, go to the Oxford Union website or my own YouTube channel and you'll find it. And that actually showed that I was the best person to do that debate. I'm not sure I did it as perfectly and as well as I could have. But I tried to pitch the arguments in a way that would appeal to the average person. Perhaps I wasn't hard line enough or wasn't strong enough for some people, but I tried to cast the arguments in a way that would appeal to the middle of the road people, people perhaps who were not entirely sold on the Israeli or the Palestinian cause. And I can only say, it's purely anecdotal but quite a lot of people who attended that debate changed their minds to support BDS as a result of that debate. In the end, we actually lost the debate, or I lost the debate, I'm very sorry, I apologise. But it was quite close. And it was probably helped by the fact that Professor Dershowitz brought quite a few of his friends and family members. Probably not enough to impact strongly the vote, but it would have made it even much closer, I think it was only about 20 votes, I think something like that between the winning and the losing sides.

What I found very interesting there is that quite clearly the Israelis are rattled. The campaign they are doing against BDS shows that they are really, really worried. They are worried about impact, not just now but even more so in the future. They can see the way the wind is blowing. And the economic power of BDS, I think, is far more effective than rockets or much of the violent resistance that takes place. If you want to hit the Israelis hard, financially is the way to do it. That could be the way to bring occupation down. The Palestinians are weak, militarily and economically. But they have allies around the world and we can use that lobbying and economic power to force Israel to the negotiating table, to force Israel to end those settlements, to ensure the three demands that were just mentioned, that BDS advocates. Those are reasonable, humanitarian and human rights demands in accordance with international law. And for me, as someone who espouses the non-violent Gandhian principles, we have seen throughout history the power of non-violence, we've seen how it has brought down great tyrannies. If you think of Gandhi in India, that non-violent struggle defeated what was at the time the mightiest military super power in history,

the British Empire. We saw the way in which non-violent resistance brought down the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, the communist dictatorship in what was then the German Democratic Republic and so on.

I believe BDS can work for the Palestinians too. But we have to argue it, sustain it, and spread it. I want to finish by saying that mention has been made of the new law that's been proposed to be introduced to prevent local authorities from engaging in boycott, which will affect a whole range of issues where local authorities, democratically accountable to their local communities, to their citizens, will now be denied by law to use BDS as a weapon. And that will of course impact upon the struggle against the Israeli occupation as well. It will mean that those many courageous, inspiring local authorities who have taken a stand against the Israeli occupation will no longer have the legal power and right to do so. That is not only an attack upon the right to protest and support the Palestinian cause, it's a fundamental threat for local democracy and we must resist it. Resist it in the name of our citizens; resist it in the name of Palestine. Thank you.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Q&A session was introduced by Sameh Habeeb and by a statement by Baroness Jenny Tonge. The following questions have been summarized.

Sameh Habeeb: Thank you. I'd like to add that the PRC as well as the wider solidarity movement here will not tolerate any kind of anti-Semitism. However, we highly encourage the open criticism of Israel and its policies and its atrocities against the Palestinians. Now we are experiencing the suffering of the Palestinian prisoner, Mohammad Al-Qeeq. He has been suffering for



the last, nearly 90 days in the Israeli prison and he is on hunger strike and is nearing to death. His only fault is that he's a journalist, covering what is going on there. This is just one glimpse of what is going on there. Israel is perpetrating hideous crimes within the Gaza Strip, the most densely populated open-air prison, in the West Bank, in Jerusalem, house demolitions, kicking people out, in violation of many international laws and international treaties. I don't want to add more. I'd now like to open the floor to the Q&A.

Baroness Jenny Tonge: Thank you very much, Sameh. I'm just going to thank you all for coming tonight, although there was another meeting with the Palestinian delegation here today. I just want to give you some very important information. My two favourite sound bites, I got into trouble for the first one, and that was echoing what you said about Israel's behaviour. I said that the trouble is with Israel nowadays, it's simply not kosher. I know this was the wrong use of the word kosher probably, but everyone knew what I meant. It is not behaving like Jewish people. You know, it just does not and it hasn't. To me, there is no relationship towards Judaism. The second sound bite I'd always like to utter is that I'm not anti-Semitic, I don't know how many times I've been accused of anti-Semitism, of course I have, all the time, because I criticise Israel and I don't always use my words carefully, because I don't think they deserve it, frankly. But if you are accused of anti-Semitism, say no, I'm not anti-Semitic, I'm anti injustice. And actually, the injustice that has been meted out on the Palestinians is the worst thing that has been happening in the last century, it really is. It's injustice, that's what it is.

The third thing I wanted to tell you is, you might have noticed that this government and David Cameron in particular are very pro-Israel, very supportive indeed. You know the recent events on the boycott and things like that, which I'm waiting to hear more about in the morning in the House. But I learnt tonight that the government are not just planning to mark the Balfour Declaration anniversary next year, they are going to celebrate it. Now, that word 'celebrate' really worries me and I thought you all should know this, because we're going to be prepared for that. If they are honestly thinking of celebrating the Balfour Declaration, I think we're really in for trouble, frankly, so I think they need to know that.

CONCLUSIONS

- Criticism of Israel is “healthy” and highly encouraged as the occupying power is in constant violations of the UN resolutions, International laws and the Universal declaration of Human rights.
- Many pro Israel organisations in the UK and in Europe are launching “harsh” attacks on Israel’s critics. They (critics) are often described as anti-Semitic as they only speak out against human rights violations of Israel in occupied Palestine. This is unethical and unacceptable.
- Anti-Semitism and any forms of racism against the “Jewish People” is categorically unacceptable and wrong. Anti-Semitism will not help the just Palestinian cause and will only damage the fine social cohesion in the UK and elsewhere.
- Mainstream Jewish organisations in the UK and Europe must ensure that the definition of “anti-Semitism” fall in the right scope (which is all forms of racism and discrimination against the Jewish people) and that it is not used in an over generic manner by pro Israeli spin and propaganda organisations for political purposes.
- Conservative party and UK Government must end their aggressive campaigns targeting the pro Palestine activism particularly, BDS which is a fine non-violent means that seeks an end for the Israeli occupation.
- The public and the media should not confuse political criticism of the Israeli government and its policies towards the Palestinian people and the non-Jewish citizens of Israel as anti-Semitism;
- Anti-Semitism shall not be tolerated and should be strongly condemned at all times;
- Israel should refrain from using claims of anti-Semitism as a tool to silence advocates for Palestinian rights;
- The media should present accurate and balanced accounts of issues related to Israel and Palestine and stop bias representations of Palestine and the Palestinians;
- Israel should take responsibility for its actions and respect international law and UN resolutions that condemn its violations;
- Israel should bring an immediate end to its illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, as recognised by international law.





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