

THE PALESTINIAN NAKBA: 68 Years of Diaspora



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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

On Tuesday 10th May, the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), SNP Friends of Palestine (SNPFoP), Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East (LFPME), Liberal Democrats Friends of Palestine (LDFP) organized a roundtable discussion in the Houses of Parliament chaired by Tommy Sheppard MP. The seminar commemorated the events of the Nakba, the ‘catastrophe’.

In 1948 Israel caused the displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinian who became refugees in neighboring Arab countries while at least 200,000 were internally displaced. The Nakba represents the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the expropriation of their homes and lands. Today is evident that the Nakba is still an ongoing process as millions of Palestinian refugees remain displaced and dispossessed.

On the 68th anniversary of the Nakba, the roundtable discussion focused on the possible mechanism to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict in light of International law and the UN resolutions. Speakers discussed how the history of the Nakba continues today with the plight of Palestinian refugees, the role of the international community and mechanisms of Independence and self-determination for the Palestinian people.

Many MPs attended and some contributed to the discussion, including: Martyn Day MP, Chris Stephens MP, Ronnie Cowan MP, Chris Law MP, Carol Monaghan MP, Owen Thompson MP, Richard Arkless MP, Paula Sheriff MP, Margaret Ferrier MP, and Dr. Ibrahim Khadra.

Speakers

Tommy Sheppard MP, Host and Chair

Manuel Hassassian, Palestinian Ambassador to the UK

Karma Nabulsi, Professor at Oxford University

Jonathan Fryer, Chair of Liberal Democrats Friends of Palestine

Caroline Patricia Lucas MP, Green Party

Sameh Habeeb, Head of Media/PR at Palestinian Return Centre

Biographies

H.E. Ambassador Manuel Hassassian is the Palestinian Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Professor Karma Nabulsi is a fellow in Politics at St Edmund Hall and lectures at the University of Oxford. She was Specialist Advisor to the British All-Party Commission of Inquiry on Palestinian Refugees, and its Report, Right of Return. She is Chair of Trustees and co-founder of HOPING Foundation, which raises awareness of Palestinian refugee youth and sponsors art, music, scholarships and education, sports and associational activities for young Palestinians in refugee camps across the Arab world.

Jonathan Fryer is the Chair of Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine. Jonathan is a freelance writer, lecturer and broadcaster on international affairs. For seven years, he was based in Brussels, initially for Reuters, and now writes mainly for the BBC and The Guardian. He has written a dozen non-fiction books, including volumes on Brussels and London. He also lectures part-time at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies.

Caroline Patricia Lucas MP, is an English politician and member of the Green Party of England and Wales who has been the Member of Parliament (MP) for Brighton Pavilion since the 2010 general election, when she became the UK's first Green Party MP.

Sameh Habeeb is Head of Media & PR at the Palestinian Return Centre. He worked as a journalist in the Gaza strip during Israel's war on Gaza "Operation Cast Lead". From 2011 to 2015 he led PRC's successful application for the United Nations ECOSOC NGO consultative status.



Speeches

INTRODUCTIONS

Tommy Sheppard, MP, introduced the event and presented the speakers.

Sunday, 15th of May, as many of you will know is the 68th anniversary of the Nakba. Nakba means 'catastrophe' and it refers to not only one day but to the 1947 to 1949 period when the Palestine war and the creation of the State of Israel led to the displacement of some three quarters of a million Palestinians from their homes. All of them, to this day, have not been able to return. Celebration would be a ridiculous word. We meet to commemorate those events and to reflect upon them and to look at what we can do in the here and now to make things right in that period in history.

We have some distinguished speakers which I am going to introduce in a moment, but I also wanted to make a statement right at the very beginning, given the events that have occurred in the British politics in the last couple of weeks. I, and my party, and all of the people active in this campaign have always resisted anti-Semitism in this country and we will always do so. Our campaign is not against Judaism. In fact, one of the ironies in this debate is that if we can create a free and independent Palestine that we all wish to see, and support the Palestinians in doing that, that will be a land in which Jews and Muslims can live as equal human beings under the law, a situation that doesn't pertain in either the State of Israel or the Occupied Territories at the moment. So there is nothing in this campaign which is anti-Semitic and I think it is extremely wrong for some people to try and use anti-Semitism to discourage and to attack the campaign for Palestinian statehood. It is absolutely legitimate to attack the Israeli government, the Israeli premier and the Israeli armed forces in what they are doing and that doesn't make any of us anti-Semites. I just wanted to make that clear at the beginning.

It is my delight, yet again, to introduce Manuel Hassassian, the Palestinian Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Manuel Hassassian

Manuel Hassassian is the Palestinian Ambassador to the UK. His speech placed the events of the Nakba in historical context and described the challenges to achieving a political solution.

We come here today not to celebrate but to commemorate. We are commemorating today the 68th year of the Nakba. I don't know whether I'm going to see it in my lifetime but we have to stop commemorating because this has been an overdue problem that has to be solved. It is a shame that after 68 years Israel cannot recognize and acknowledge that they have displaced, that they have diasporised Palestinians and that they have made them live in exile for so many years.

800,000 Palestinians were forcefully displaced through systematic actions of massacres against them. 480 villages were destroyed and depopulated. The Nakba will continue as long as we still live in exile. And that cannot continue forever, ladies and gentlemen, because this is a basic human right for people to go back to their original homes. UN Security Council resolution 194 stipulates that we should go back to our original homes and not to the State of Palestine. Those who opt to, that's their own prerogative. But people do mix between going back to their original homes or going back to the State of Palestine. We are struggling for the 7 million refugees today, 5 million of whom are stateless.

The Nakba is going on as long as the right of return is not being observed. The Nakba will continue until every single Palestinian who has been displaced



for the second generation has the right to go back home. The Nakba is the essence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is a major issue, because we are talking about homeland. We are talking about identity. We are talking about Palestinians, who have been dispersed all over the world, living under varying economic conditions, politically disposed, stateless. Let me not talk about the conditions of our refugees. Today we know that we have a major problem, the refugee problem in Syria. Ladies and gentlemen, a big portion of those refugees are Palestinians from al-Yarmouk camp. This is the third refugee incident. How can we accept a problem like this that comprises one third of the refugee problems all over the world? 68 years and we haven't seen much being done by the international community, neither by the big powers, who gave us empty promises and always unethically supported the State of Israel.

We have to complain about Israel's anti-Semitism to the Palestinians and not the other way around. Israel has been practising all kinds of illegal activities by building settlements, annexing lands, by dispossessing the Palestinians, revoking the residents' rights in Jerusalem, building bypass roads on Palestinian land. The idea of a two-state solution today is a two-state delusion. There is no more room to talk about a two-state solution. We have been neglected by the commitments of the international community for a two-state solution. We've been politically naive to accept a State on 22% of historic Palestine. When I go to Palestine and I look at the situation, I see islands of territory in the West Bank with no geographical continuity, totally separated from East Jerusalem, let alone Gaza, the forgotten Gaza. How can we keep talking about a two-State solution?

And when we talk about a two-state solution, we are described as anti-Semitic, and accused of wanting to dissolve Israel. Because they scare us with their nuclear bombs and we scare them with our demographic bomb. Two-state solution is a non-solution. One-state solution is a non-solution. So what does Israel want? Israel, ladies and gentlemen, today wants the West Bank and they still refer to it as Judea and Samaria. Today they are trying to pass votes in the Knesset in order to seize the entire area of the West Bank. Once that is done, there is no more a Palestinian state. We know exactly where the Zionist policy is heading. Of course, this is supported by an ethnic cleansing process, by continuing to build bypass roads, destroying villages, dispossessing people, terrorising them, burning Palestinians. Then, if somebody from SNP supports the Palestinian right for self-determination, by de-facto he becomes anti-Semitic.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have tonight to recognise that yes, Israel's occupation is still persisting, Israel's occupation is still the name of the game. I have to make a simple statement here about your parent British government, if you allow me to say so. This government is one of the most hypocritical governments I've ever experienced in my last ten years. They say they are anti-settlement activities; and yet, they are criminalizing those organisations that are adopting BDS against settlement products. Explain to me this oxymoron. They say they are for a two-state solution, they recognise the State of Israel but

they abstain recognising us as a State in the UN General Assembly. They say that they are for the right, the identity and for the support of the Palestinian culture in Jerusalem. Yet, when we apply to UNESCO, they also abstain. Is this democracy or hypocrisy?

What a shame, high officials in this government, including the Prime Minister, daring to say in the Knesset that the UK is proud to create the State of Israel through its Balfour Declaration. Yes, Israel was created at the expense of the dispossession of an entire nation. If the UK is proud of that, I say that the UK should be ashamed because of not considering the history and their moral responsibility towards the Palestinians. They are responsible for the displacement of the Palestinians. They are responsible for the refugee question, which has not been solved until today. To add insult to injury, they were so boastful when I met them in the Ambassador's office or in the Foreign Office to tell me face-to-face that next year we are going to mark the centenary of the Balfour declaration. Marking the 1917 Balfour Declaration and you are proud of creating the State of Israel. Israel, which is an occupying force, an autocratic regime with extreme religious right-wing spokespersons being in the Knesset today. Decimating an entire nation is not even being considered. Well, I'd like to see a honest declaration today, where he says that if you want to believe in a two-state solution, we'd better recognise the State of Palestine. This is how you rectify the wrongdoings of almost one hundred years.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have given up on our struggle. We have given up on violence and we said, only political accommodation could create a State of Palestine. For 22 years we have embarked on a peace process that proved nothing except more illegal settlements, more settlers, and more confiscation of land. Today, I attended a talk by Prince Hassan of Jordan at the National Liberal Club. I asked him one question after acknowledging his brilliant speech. I said, Your Royal Highness, if a two-state solution is a delusion and a one-state solution is a non-solution, because of Israel's position, what about a federation between Palestine and Israel and a confederation with Jordan. Of course, the Prince is smart enough; he took me to the desert and brought me back to the sea without giving me any answers. Why did I mention this? Because this is the public discourse today among intellectuals. This is what is happening when we listen to those people that are alert observers of the Middle East, those who read about the Palestinian-Israeli daily conflict. We are running out of ideas. Of course we always believe that we have to think outside the box. We have to think laterally and be ingenious with our ideas. We have tried every single trick in the book and it never works out with Israel.

One thing I want to conclude with is that Israel does not want peace. Israel wants the Occupied Territories. They want the rest of Palestine and they don't want to see a single Palestinian there. This is because the Messianic dream is greater Israel and an exclusive Jewish state. This is what Israel wants. If you talk about anti-Semitism, if you talk about apartheid, I think Israel is the best example ever given along history. It is a shame that this conflict has been going on for the last hundred years. It is one of the longest occupations in modern

history. Yet, with the 21st century, with all this technology, with globalisation and every single human being knowing exactly what happens in every spot in Palestine; yet, they are not doing anything about pressuring Israel to rectify this situation and to have our right to self-determination. Today we have 5 million Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. We have almost 1.8 million Palestinians as Israeli citizens. 5 years from now the Palestinians are going to be the majority in that part of the world. I would like to see how Israel is going to solve the problem then.

I have always believed that concessions are made at the crescendo of power. You don't make concessions when you are weak. You make the concessions for the sustainability and the longevity of the peace that will be sustainable for years to come, when you are in power. Israel is abusing its power, thanks to the USA, thanks to the UK, and thanks to an impotent EU, that has left Israel to go ahead with all its policies against the Palestinians with impunity. The price is going to be very high; we'll leave that to history.

Professor Karma Nabulsi

Karma Nabulsi described her experience and research on the right of the refugees to return to their homes. This is the key to peace and to rectifying the injustices of the ongoing Nakba.

Thank you so much for inviting me today, first of all to the Palestinian Return Centre. It is great that they have come together with Scotland and the rest of the country to commemorate this really important day for us, which is an ongoing commemoration and an ongoing struggle for Palestinians. I've been in this room many times over many years. I came to Britain as a Palestinian representative, as Manuel is here now. It's very touching to hear him speak about the right of return. I was touched to see that we have not changed and that we hold steadfast to our position.



I came in the 1980s and I went up to Scotland. It was the first place where I spoke. I got completely the wrong end of the stick, because everything I said, there was an eruption of applause, and I could have been reading the phonebook. Such was the solidarity of the Scottish people with the Palestinian people that I felt that they understood. I spent a long time going around this country and speaking with people about this issue. When I arrived at the door of this room, I saw that it was the Peel room. One of the problems here is the lack of knowledge of a lot of British people about their history. Through a series of circumstances which I cannot explain, I ended up in school here when I was 13. I knew everything about British history and the young, British people that I met knew nothing. That is because my dad taught me from the time I could speak every white paper, every commission, like the Peel Commission. This is a common experience for all Palestinians. That is our history because we were entirely dependent on your country and the catastrophe, the Nakba, is intimately related to those previous generations and the current one.

The right of return report that I was involved in was something very important. It is so nice to see here Labour, Scottish MPs, Liberal and the absent, but soon to join Conservatives. We did something in the right of return report which was to gather all these Councils of all the different parties. They went out to the region and went to speak to the refugees themselves as we organised these meetings for them. This was remarkably brave. British MPs went and asked the refugees, what do you think is the problem, which I think was very brave to say to a room full of Palestinian refugees. They turned around and said, what you did was the problem. From the old to the young, every Palestinian knows British history. What was important about this report was that they came back and they gathered all of the evidence from the people.

They made a series of recommendations, which I think was as valuable today as it was then. The first is about historical responsibility and acknowledgment of their historical responsibility. The second was that the refugees were not the obstacle to peace, as many people who want to make a solution today say. The refugees are the key to peace. Everybody who knows anything about peace building understands that the people have to be involved in that and that their rights and their dignity have to be respected. My family is from Yaffa, we are refugees. But refugees or not, this happened to us as a society. This happened to all of us. And if you looked now at the West Bank, at Gaza and Jerusalem, we're all living a predicament as refugees.

Whether we are in Lebanon, in Syria, in Jerusalem, it's an ongoing process. It is a process of ethnic cleansing. And that was what the Nakba was about. I've done a lot of research and one of my closest friends is Ilan Pappé and we did a lot of work together before he wrote his book on ethnic cleansing. This is the most important thing in history that we haven't forgotten. There was a famous saying by Ben Gurion, another thing that I had to learn from my dad. Ben Gurion said, "The old will die and the young will forget." The Palestinians have not forgotten. The young have not forgotten. That's because the right of

return and the Nakba has become the main organised event about resistance. This is not just about our expulsion and our dispossession. This is about our affirmation to return.

Of course, it is a right enshrined in international law. Of course, but it's natural. That international law, resolution 194 is based on a natural right, which is that we have the right to return to our home. Everybody has that right. The most important thing to learn about the Palestinian people is that yes, some of us are from the city, but most of us are farmers. It's not an existential return to an abstract place; for us it is immediate. It's a village. It's a piece of land. It's a tree, it's our neighbours. It is a real thing. People who come from farming backgrounds understand that. We have not surrendered that and that is the essence.

Refugee choice is that people have the right to choose whether to return home or not. The mobilisation for Palestinians is too big; if you talk about the right of return, everybody will be there. The concept is that return unifies us. People will say that some people want it and some people don't. No. All Palestinians affirm that this is our right and the solution to any peace. I'm very secular about what the solution should be. Some people are very keen on two states. I believe that of course we have the right to self-determination under international law. We have the right to liberate our land. There are those who argue for a one, bi-national state. I would say, it's much simpler than that. Allow the injustice to be rectified. Educate people so that they understand that the injustice has to be rectified. Once people can return to their homes, let those people democratically decide, the people that live there, what kind of framework they want. Let the people choose what kind of structure they would like. The injustice is what has to be rectified.

This commission of the right of return that we did unified British parliamentarians with Palestinians and I would like to encourage with the Return Centre that we do something like that again, to bring the Palestinian stories home to young British people and also to the quarters of power where we now are.

Jonathan Fryer

Jonathan Fryer discussed the changing attitudes of the public towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and stressed the steps needed to ensure that justice is achieved.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. The late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir liked to propagate a myth that the modern State of Israel was created in a land without a people, for a people without a land. Now, we in this room, of course are well aware that that was a myth, a rewriting of history, a rewriting of facts on the ground. It's correct and right that we commemorate the Nakba 68 years on, because it should not be forgotten. It's important that the truth of

that event and of everything that happened later to refugees, wherever they ended up, should be known around the world, not just among the Palestinians or wider Arab community.

One positive thing is that actually here in Britain, attitudes are changing and knowledge is improving. I think it's fair to say that 50 years ago most British people had a sort of emotional attachment to Israel, it didn't matter whether they were Jews or Christians, secular or whatever. That has changed. Public opinion in this country has changed dramatically and it is continuing to change as we witness the injustices taking place today. The Nakba itself was probably the greatest injustice in the post-Second World War world and it is made even worse by the prolongation of the occupation in the West Bank and the siege of Gaza.

I'm always irritated when I hear people talking about settlers, because that also is creating a myth. It is creating this idea of a noble people somehow making a new life on land, again, allegedly without a people. They are not settlers; they are occupiers and should be described as such. I welcome very much the initiative that came from the Scottish National Party and indeed from the Palestinian Return Centre to ensure that at least four political parties are involved in the event tonight. It is true that we have a number of Conservatives, who are also very sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. I believe that the best way we can commemorate the Nakba is not to look backwards but to look forwards and to have a plan here in Britain of how we can actually make the public opinion, which moved in favour of the Palestinians and is highly critical of Israeli excesses, into a cross-party political movement that will lead to Britain recognising Palestine without preconditions and then following a series of steps to counter the injustices that exist.

It's absolutely correct that Britain has a huge historic responsibility and many of us I feel, even though we were not alive at the time, feel a degree of guilt about that. But let's turn that sense of responsibility into a sense of opportunity.



Within the EU, Sweden led the way, France is seriously considering its position on Palestine as well; Britain, as the former Mandate power, ought to be leading the way as well. It's true at last that the last Conservative government has been hypocritical, yes, has been unwilling to follow through what it says it believes in. It talks about justice, it talks about solving this sorts of problems, let's ensure that they do.

Work on a cross-party basis, get the media involved, most of the public is ready for that. We can take a lead in this country in changing not the history but the future and working with the Palestinians here and in other parts of the world, in the Occupied Territories and in Israel itself. This is to make sure that when next year comes around and there is a commemoration, certainly not a celebration, of the Balfour Declaration and the 50th anniversary of the occupation of the West Bank that we then have an opportunity to make as much noise as possible and to say, 2017 will be the first year of real justice and the first step to the return.

Sameh Habeeb

Sameh Habeeb analysed the foreign policies of the UK government towards Israel. He condemned the UK's arms exports which makes them complicit to Israel's war crimes against the people of Gaza.

On behalf of the Palestinian Return Centre, I'd like to thank all the groups engaged in this event and I hope next time we will have the Conservatives. We are here today in the very same Parliament that witnessed and prepared for the calamity of the Palestinian people. Over nearly a hundred years ago, the story of the Palestinians started here in this Parliament, where those who do not own promised what they do not own to a third people, leaving Palestinians displaced worldwide in the diaspora until now. I think that if we are to speak about the current British government, I think it is important to notice that since the arrival of Cameron in the office in 2010, there have been dramatic changes towards Israel, based on the agenda that he set before in which he clearly stated his support for Israel. When he came to Parliament, the only thing that he said in November 2010 was that Gaza is like an open air-prison. Then he was grilled by the Israeli lobby and he never uttered a single word in favour of the Palestinians. Rather the opposite, he was vocal in his support of Israel, where he did his famous speech in the Israeli Parliament and previously he said that he is a self-declared Semite and that Israel is in the DNA of himself as well as his party. So what do we expect from a government led by a self-declared Zionist that thinks Israel is in his DNA? Nothing.

What we expect from him and what we have witnessed was, if I may say, complicity in war crimes. This very government doubled the amount of arms contracts to Israel. In 2011, the size of the contract was £16 million, this was just part of it. The number jumped in 2014 to nearly £30 million, just for contracts with Israeli companies. There are many other projects in which British and Israeli

organisations and companies are engaged in developing high-tech military machines. Most of these weapons were used in 2009, 2012, and 2014 to bombard the very people of Gaza. So it is clear that this government is engaged in war crimes. There have been some campaigns against the government's foreign policy on arms but I don't think they will be successful. This government is clearly declaring its utmost support for Israel and will continue to do so. For example, if we hear the British government speaking about the foreign policy in Palestine, they'd clearly have the Middle Eastern Foreign Affairs Minister, used to be Alistair Burt, the Conservative Friend of Israel supporter, he used to be a leader for the group. Then we have Tobias Ellwood, another Conservative Friend of Israel and sadly, anyone coming under that position, traditionally they have to be pro-Israel. Even Tobias Ellwood urged the British parliamentarians in 2014 not to vote for the Palestinian bid; that is a man who is supposed to be in the middle, neutral. Sadly, the very positions of this government are complicit.

This government should now be held accountable for what has happened in the Gaza Strip. The UK laws are clear when it comes to exporting weapons to any country. It states, "where there is a clear risk of the equipment being used for internal repression, where the export would provoke or prolong a conflict or aggravate existing tensions or conflicts" and so on. This government is violating its own rules when it comes to exporting weapons to Israel. Traditionally, the government has been sadly complicit in the plight of the Palestinian people, starting from the Balfour Declaration until now. The government will continue its support to Israel and sadly we will witness maybe another war soon in Gaza in which the British weapons will be used to bombard the people of Gaza.

I hope we will take it to the next step in which hopefully by 2020 the government could go and I hope we will have a government but at least, to bring a peace process to the Middle East. I hope the UK will impose a ban of weapons and army trade on Israel. At least this would make the number of casualties smaller and smaller. I hope so.



Caroline Lucas, MP

What I wanted to do is to say how honoured I am to share this important moment with you, looking back at the Nakba, 68 years ago. I bring with me greetings from the Green Party and to say that we will continue to stand with you to demand freedom, justice and peace in Palestine. I wanted to say as well that, from what I have heard, it just reminds me again of the importance not just of looking backwards but also looking forwards. Right now, looking at what's happening, you will know that the picture is incredible bleak. In a sense, we are running out of words to describe the full horror of the situation still faced by most Palestinians today.

The house demolitions not only continue but they accelerate. The checkpoints numbers continue to increase. The Israeli government have increased its use of administrative detention. Palestinian children remain in custody. Settlement activities continue in the West Bank and the people of Gaza are still under siege. The blockade of Gaza remains to prohibit the entry of food, of medicines, of building materials, and so much more. The Israeli government does it with apparent impunity.

I think that what's happening there in Palestine is an immense and grotesque crime against humanity. It is completely scandalous that our government is standing by and letting it happen. What we have to ensure is that our government holds the Israeli government to account for the continual violations of international law.

One of the areas I've been working on is the campaign against the arms trade, which is indeed looking at the increasing evidence that weapons containing components made in the UK are indeed being used by the Israelis when it comes to weapon control, targeting systems, ammunitions, drones, armed vehicles. Therefore, I think we are right not only to talk about hypocrisy of the British government but the complicity of the British government as well.



It gives me no pleasure to say that, but I think we should face this issue and realise the scale of what we have to do. I take comfort from seeing so many of you here tonight. I want to pledge again my support to you and to say that I think we have a real opportunity with 2017 being that anniversary, as we've heard. We absolutely need to make that the long overdue deadline for the end of the occupation. The more we can work together to achieve that, the better hope we will have of doing it.

Round-Table Discussion

Chris Law, MP: Given Tony Blair has been a previous minister in government for some time, is he making any impact at all on the issue as a former Middle East Quartet representative?

Alan Brown, MP: talking about how complicit the UK is, and now it's undeniable that the UK is complicit, but it is also important to consider the role of the United States. Jonathan mentioned that the people in the UK are more educated, but what about the attitude of the people in the USA towards the issue?

Ambassador Manuel Hassassian: My answer to you is and would be disasters. Tony Blair never contributed anything, whilst bridging the inequities between the Palestinians and the Israelis. He went and enjoyed his pasha room at the American colony with so much security involving the taxpayers here and did nothing to remove even one checkpoint in the Occupied Territories. So we don't have any trust and he has been an utter failure and good that he has been removed from the Quartet.

My answer to you, sir, since we are under the dome of democracy in the UK, we have focused on the UK government. But actually, if I wanted to repeat my speech, I would speak about the United States and its policies towards the Middle East, let alone, it has been a strategy for the US to be supporting the State of Israel unequivocally. They consider Israel to be a strategic asset for their own national interest in the Middle East. It is so unfortunate that the United States that brought itself into the Madrid peace process to shepherd and to be the guide of the peace process ended up to be supporting the top dog, Israel, over the underdog and today we cannot say that we had a third party at the negotiating table. That's why we have been seeing 22 years of utmost failure of diplomacy of the United States prove nothing except disasters. That's why we have been talking about alternatives to a third party. We looked at the EU, led by the troika, led by the UK, also an utter failure in being involved in the political process for reasons that are very well known to us; one is that the United States [inaudible] them from being involved in the political process, let alone Israel. For this reason, I think we need to find other plausible solutions; and the only plausible solution that I can see is having back all UN resolutions and back to the UN with the support of the international community. That's the only way we can get ahead.

Karma Nabulsi: The main parties in Britain have always had two traditions in them. There's always been a very strong tradition of support for Palestine and I would say the British public are very sympathetic and understanding. We've always said it, the people are with us. Literally, the people are with us because it's a cause of justice. It's very simple; it's very clear. Governments have other relationships. We can see what happens when, for example, in Latin America, during the war on Gaza, people sent ambassadors home. Governments stood up for us. We can see how it can be done and we look at, for example, Scotland's position. It's very important that the connection between people and their representatives is close enough to bring forward a more just policy position on Palestine.

There is something very interesting happening in America with the youth. You have the Jewish Voice for Peace, that are running extraordinary campaigns of boycott, divestment, and sanctions in universities on universal human rights principles. Extraordinary, beautiful campaigns. They are learning their crafts in being political organisers and being good citizens through Palestine like the generations do here and everywhere else. It always is the issue that brings people together in the struggle for justice. That's one, the Jewish Voice for Peace. The other one is the Students for Justice in Palestine, an incredible network of universities, campaigns, students, the young generation. I think that's a very good sign. If you go to the campuses and see lots of what the youth are doing in America, it's a radical change. So we are very optimistic because we have young people, we have a just cause and we connect to the youth all over the world. We see them come to us when it's about a simple issue for justice.

Jonathan Fryer: I'd like to add a few comments on the issue of the American opinion. As it has been mentioned, there is a big shift taking place amongst young people and indeed amongst Jewish groups, which is very encouraging. Less encouraging are the Christian Zionists, particularly in the Republican party, who believe that Israel is the way that is going to lead to the second coming of Christ and therefore, they support fundamentally the whole Israel experiment, or whatever you want to call it. I have to say also, less encouraging considering the possible outcome of the elections in November. We mustn't expect much from Hillary Clinton, if she becomes the next President of the USA because she is as pro-Israel as any of her predecessors. The conclusion we have to draw from this is yes, public to public and Palestinians to Americans try to help change public opinion there, but we can't wait for America to change its opinion. We must not accept the Israeli mantra that only America can and that we will only listen to America. We've got to get the European Union more coherent, more cohesive in its policies towards Palestine and to insist that that voice is heard. Because working together, the 28 members of the EU do have clapped in the UN and in other forums. And of course, through the EU we can introduce various forms of sanctions, which will put pressure up on Israel, I believe particularly with settlements products, maybe later in other ways as well.

We have now reached that point. We are beyond that point. We have to do it. We have to show the way.

Sameh Habeeb: I believe that the very friend of Israel, Tony Blair is yet to bring more disasters for the pro-Palestinian movements across Europe with its new position as chair of the new commission on anti-Semitism. I'm sure he will be orchestrating more attacks on the pro-Palestinian movement and we will be witnessing more dramatic changes soon. On the question of the British and American foreign policy, the British government has strategically been attached to the Americans. Since the arrival of Obama in 2009, he showed no interest in the Palestine-Israel conflict, no initiative has been made. This was reflected on Cameron when he came to this government, no initiatives whatsoever were made. There were only some statements of the government that denounced the settlements and other broader statements of supporting the two-state solution and pledging more aid and humanitarian assistance. This is what we hear from this government and this is what we'll continue to hear. I hope this will change soon.



Conclusions

The UK government should:

- Acknowledge its historical responsibility for the events that led to the Nakba and its ongoing consequences;
- Apologise for the Balfour Declaration and its consequences for the Palestinian people;
- Ban the exports of arms to Israel;
- Launch an investigation into the use of British arms by Israel on the people of Gaza;
- Follow the lead of other European countries and recognise the State of Palestine;
- Respect the international human rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of the refugees to return to their homes.

The EU should:

- Ban products from illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories.

The UN should:

- Enforce its Security Council resolutions condemning Israel's violations of international law;
- Pressure Israel to allow the implementation of the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.







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