



30 April 2019

FAO: the Editor, The Camden New Journal,

We write in response to a letter dated 18th April 2019 from the Camden Branch of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign who express their concern about an event being held at the Jewish Community's JW3 centre which will “celebrate British young people and other residents of the UK who volunteer for service in the IDF, the army of the state of Israel.”

The authors assert how “Israel has been occupying Palestinian territories for over half a century”. Let’s be clear here insofar as facts are concerned. Until the PLO and Israel signed the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, there were no Palestinian territories. In fact, during the 19 years of illegal Jordanian occupation of the West Bank between the War of Independence in ’48 and the Six Day War in ’67, there were no calls from any Palestinian group for an independent state. The Oslo accords did of course change that and created the Palestinian Authority (PA), of which Mahmoud Abbas is the President, currently serving the 14th year of his 4-year elected term. The PA-controlled territories within the West Bank are just that; autonomous territories controlled by the PA. Their citizens are not citizens of Israel and are therefore, as one of many examples, subject to checks at border control points in much the same way as every other country on earth controls access through its borders. That is NOT apartheid.

All citizens within Israel’s non-disputed borders have full and equal rights enshrined in a series of Basic Laws and its non-Jewish citizens – Muslims, Christians, Druze, Baha’I and others - are represented throughout Israeli society, from the Knesset (Parliament) and Supreme Court through to sports, tv and everyday life. It is a recognised fact that the freedom and rights enjoyed by Israel’s minorities are unparalleled in the Middle East. That is NOT apartheid.

Insofar as Israel’s 2018 Nation State Law’ is concerned, to assert that this is an example of apartheid is simply to distort and invert the facts. Whilst it drew international criticism, as well as from the Palestinian leadership and heads of Israel’s minorities, the Nation-State Law contains no additional rights for Jews; nor does it promulgate fewer rights for Arabs. Amongst some of the criticism is that the Law downgrades Arabic from an official language to one with a ‘special status.’ However, upon closer scrutiny of the content of the Law, this can be seen largely as a symbolic sleight since a subsequent clause says, “*This clause does not harm the status given to the Arabic language before this law came into effect*”.

It is worth noting that the Palestinian Authority’s own Basic Palestinian Law confirms that Arabic shall be the official language of a Palestinian state (making no mention of any other language), that Islam is its official religion and Sharia will form the basis of its legal system.

The accusation of apartheid in Israel is nothing less than a malicious hate-fueled attempt to demonise and delegitimise the only true liberal democracy in the Middle East. It serves only to downplay and denigrate the very real suffering endured by South Africa’s Black population during its apartheid era and drive the prospect of peace between Israel and the Palestinians farther away.

Insofar as Israel’s IDF is concerned, most Israeli citizens are obliged to do national service of up to two-and-a-half years in the country’s military, and so a significant number of British-born Israelis or immigrants with dual nationality will inevitably join Israel’s armed forces for a spell. The IDF is a modern, professional army with a high dedication to ethics in warfare and to upholding international laws. Add to that the fact that dozens of armies recruit volunteer soldiers, including Great Britain, the US, France,

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Spain, Denmark, the UAE, New Zealand and Serbia, and some accept non-military volunteers, like Britain's Army Cadets. Israel's volunteer and recruiting programs are not only legal and ethical, but similar to the practices of most countries in the Western world. It is absurd to imply that international Israel-supporters are guilty of improper or even criminal behaviour for activities that are both legal and common in countries around the world. It is also worth noting that more and more Muslim and Christian Arab citizens of Israel are choosing to join the IDF, despite their not being legally subject to its conscription laws.

With regard to the recent report issued by the UN Human Rights Council addressing the Gaza border violence over the past 13 months, it is worth noting that the members of its Commission of Inquiry had virtually no military knowledge or experience and framed the border violence as 'civilian protests'. In reality however, these so-called 'civilian protests' were (and continue to be) a deliberate military-style operation, orchestrated and controlled by Hamas, the internationally-proscribed terrorist group. Hamas has been waging an armed conflict against Israel for decades. Their intention was and remains to kill and wound IDF soldiers; to break through the border fence; to murder and maim innocent civilians; to destroy property and to compel the IDF to take defensive action resulting in the death of Gazan civilians for exploitation in the international arena. It is also worth noting how Israel's leading Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center has confirmed that, upon examination, about 80% of those Palestinians killed in these riots found to be affiliated with Hamas or with other terrorist organisations.

Addressing the PSC's claims, following the recent general election in Israel, that 88% of the Israeli electorate support "the continued occupation of Palestinian territories", this is simply to look at this with blinkers on. The PSC are not unknown to ignore context, nor are they strangers to ignoring the actions of the Palestinian leadership – the "other side" of this conflict. The PA has repeatedly refused to negotiate with Israel, it continues to promote violence and incite its civilians against Jewish Israelis, it continues to glorify terrorism through every facet of its society and it continues to deny ordinary hard-working Palestinians their full salaries whilst continuing to prioritise the paying of salaries to blood-soaked incarcerated Palestinian terrorists in Israeli prisons. As for the low percentage vote of parties who stand against the so-called occupation", the PSC tellingly fails to clarify that two of the parties it mentions are not only anti-occupation but are simply anti-Zionist too. That is to say that they do not believe Israel should exist in any borders.

Toward the end of their letter, they brand Israel as a "*racist regime*". This is unsurprising given that it is coming from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Their solidarity with the Palestinian people is overwhelmingly predicated on the opposition to, and demonisation of, the Jewish state within any borders. The same PSC, much like the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, has been silent on the slaughter of almost 4000 Palestinians in Syria and the ethnic cleansing of thousands of others, they have been inactive on the very real apartheid-like laws in place for Palestinians in Lebanon and most recently, they have been deafeningly silent in the face of Hamas's brutal crackdown on young Palestinian dissenters who took to the streets of Gaza simply to protest against Hamas and the dire economic conditions resulting from its genocidal war against Israel.

With the above facts in mind, whilst it is of course perfectly acceptable to be against one or more Israeli governmental policies, the PSC has once again shown that it distorts, obfuscates and inverts the facts to demonise and delegitimise Israel in the UK. However, it is quite clear that the PSC's chosen tactic of demonisation and delegitimation has failed to bring either side closer to negotiations, let alone peace.

We wish the JW3 every success with its celebratory event of British military and non-military volunteers in the IDF. These are people who serve in a moral and ethical military and who lay their own lives on the line to protect all of Israel's citizens, not just its Jewish ones.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Charney', written over a light blue background.

Paul Charney

Chairman of the Zionist Federation of the UK and Ireland

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