

Palestine — the new apartheid



Apartheid, the system of racial oppression and separation that afflicted South Africa from 1948 until the 1990s, lives on in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories today.

“I am a black South African, and if I were to change the names, a description of what is happening in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank could describe events in South Africa under Apartheid.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The UN International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (1976) defines apartheid as ‘inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over another racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.’

According to Article 2 of the Convention, these ‘inhuman acts’ include:

- Denial of the right to life and liberty;
- Imposition of living conditions calculated to cause physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Denying basic human rights and freedoms, including
 - the right to work,
 - the right to education,
 - the right to leave and to return to one’s country,
 - the right to a nationality,
 - the right to freedom of movement and residence;
- Any measures designed to divide the population along racial lines by
 - the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups,
 - the prohibition of mixed marriages,
 - the expropriation of landed property belonging to members of a racial group

The Israeli government has been guilty of all these ‘inhuman acts’, in relation to the Palestinian people.

Life and liberty

Since September 2000, the Israeli army has killed about 6,500 men, women and children in the Occupied Territories (the West Bank and Gaza), by means of bombing, house demolitions and targeted assassinations. (During the same period, fewer than 600 Israelis have been killed.) In addition, many Palestinians have died because they have been denied access to medical treatment (see reports by the Israeli Physicians for Human Rights: www.phr.org). In the West Bank, over the last few years, more than



Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem being demolished to make way for a new Israeli settlement

60 Palestinian women have been forced to give birth at checkpoints; more than half the babies and some of the mothers have died.

Currently, about 10,000 Palestinian prisoners are being held in Israeli jails, including over 300 children, many under the system of ‘administrative detention’ — i.e. without charge or trial, as in Guantanamo. (See *PSC factsheet on Political Prisoners*.)

Access, residency and freedom of movement

Since 1967 Israel has controlled entry to the Occupied Palestinian Territories and regularly turns people back at the airport or the Jordan crossing, without explanation. Families coming for summer vacation, brides and grooms, students, teachers, NGO workers, business people, are all at risk of being put on the next flight or bus out of the port of entry.

Within the OPTs, about 600 military checkpoints operate, cutting off towns and villages from one another and severely affecting access to education, health and work as well as trade. The daily experience of Palestinians at checkpoints is to be held in a queue for hours, to have their ID checked and either be allowed through or turned back, on the whim of armed soldiers. Control of all aspects of life is in the hands of Israel’s occupying army.

In a direct throwback to the days of Apartheid South Africa, a network of Israeli-only roads crisscrosses the West Bank. Palestinian vehicles (identifiable by their green number plates) are not allowed to use these roads and if caught their drivers will be shot, beaten up or arrested. A 2004 report by the Israeli human rights organisation B’Tselem, *The Forbidden Roads: The Discriminatory West Bank Road Regime*, found that “Israel restricts Palestinian travel on forty-one roads and sections of roads throughout the West Bank, totalling more than 700 kilometres of roadway.”



At the Qalandiya checkpoint: A permit is needed for Palestinians to access their home, school or hospital in Jerusalem

In April 2010 legislation (contrary to international law) was passed enabling the army to arrest and imprison or deport from the West Bank anyone with a foreign passport, Jerusalem ID or Gaza ID: potentially tens of thousands of people. These so-called 'infiltrators' will also be liable to pay the cost of their own detention or deportation.

Denial of family life

The 'denied entry' policy and threat of deportation apply to foreign passport holders married to Palestinian ID holders. There are an estimated 120,000 people in this predicament, many of them Palestinians with Western passports. They have had to resort to tourist visas, which must be renewed every three months. Israel is now refusing to let many people back in when they leave for a visa renewal, causing families who wish to remain together to relocate outside of the Occupied Territories: a form of ethnic cleansing.

The children of such marriages are affected too: from the age of 12 they are denied citizenship or residency and forced to move out of Israel.

Jerusalem: pass laws and pressure to leave

Since the illegal occupation and annexation of Jerusalem in 1967, even Palestinians born in East Jerusalem are not considered citizens but immigrants with "permanent resident" status — which is anything but permanent. "Israel treats Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem as immigrants, who live in their homes at the beneficence of the authorities and not by right," says B'Tselem. "The authorities maintain this policy although these Palestinians were born in Jerusalem, live in the city and have no other home."

Jerusalemite Palestinians are unable to live in Jerusalem with their spouses from the West Bank, and if they leave Jerusalem to live with their spouse in the West Bank, they lose their Jerusalem ID. They are also being driven out by settler violence and harassment, house demolitions and pseudo-legal processes that claim prior Jewish ownership.

The 8-metre high wall slicing through the city has cut East Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank; it is extremely difficult to obtain a pass from the occupying forces to visit the city, even in cases of family bereavement.

B'Tselem reports that Jerusalem's Jewish population, now about 70% of the city's 700,000 residents, are served by 1,000 public parks, 36 public swimming pools and 26 libraries. The estimated 260,000 Palestinians still living in East Jerusalem have 45 parks, no public swimming pools and two libraries. "Since the annexation of Jerusalem, the municipality has built almost no new school, public building or medical clinic for Palestinians," says a B'Tselem report. (See PSC fact sheet on Jerusalem.)

Ghettos and land grabs

Israel's Apartheid Wall is the most visible form of the apartheid system in the Occupied Territories. Despite the UN Resolution of 2004, which called on Israel to dismantle the Wall, built on Palestinian land, and compensate those whose lives and livelihoods had been damaged by it, it is now almost complete.

Cutting deep into the West Bank, and completely encircling some of the major centres of population, it serves to expropriate large tracts of the most fertile land and water resources and hand these over to the 500,000 Israelis illegally colonising the area.

Palestinian towns and villages are thus being turned into disconnected ghettos subject to military incursions, total closures and arbitrary curfews which may last for weeks. (See PSC's fact sheet: *The Apartheid Wall.*)



The Wall around Bethlehem separates Palestinians from Palestinians

Gaza, where the World Bank had calculated that 87% of the population were already living below the poverty line, was sealed off by Israel from the rest of the world in 2007 so that the inhabitants were reduced to tunnelling into Egypt, to import the basic necessities. The military onslaught from December 2008–January 2009 resulted in the deaths of over 1400 Palestinians, about a quarter of them children. The siege continues to this day.

The UN has repeatedly condemned Israel's ongoing policy of colonising the OPTs. Even some US

administrations, including those of Clinton and Obama, have been highly critical of this policy, calling the settlements “a major obstacle to peace.”

The situation in 2010 is worsening. The present Israeli government is pressing ahead with the building of thousands more housing units east of Jerusalem. To give its land-grab policies a veneer of legality, Israel has enacted legislation which in fact runs counter to international law. For instance, they use an obsolete Ottoman law which states that any farmer who leaves his land uncultivated for three continuous years forfeits his land to the State. Unlike the former Ottoman Empire, however, Israel has no legal jurisdiction over the West Bank, and the checkpoints and the Apartheid Wall effectively prevent farmers from reaching their land to cultivate it. The Jordan Valley has been declared ‘a military zone’, though Israeli settlers have been brought in to cultivate produce for export — while the Palestinian farmers who own it cannot grow their own food.

All this is in clear contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states: “The occupying power shall not deport or transfer part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”

Expropriation of water

Water is the most precious resource in the region. The illegal Israeli settlements control over 40% of the Occupied Territories (including most of the fertile land and aquifers) and divert scarce water resources from the Palestinians to settlement and development projects destined for Israelis only. Three million West Bank Palestinians use only 250 million cubic metres per year (83 cubic metres per Palestinian per year) while the 500,000 Israeli settlers are allocated 1,450 cubic metres of water per person per year (source: Palestine Monitor). Some settlements actually sell water to the surrounding Palestinian villages. Mr. Katz-Oz, Israel’s negotiator on water issues, made Israel’s discriminatory policy plain when he stated: “There is no reason for Palestinians to claim that just because they sit on lands, they have the rights to that water.”

Israeli companies like Carmel Agrexco make enormous profits from settler production of fruit and vegetables which require intensive irrigation, causing degradation to the environment and poverty for Palestinian farmers deprived of their water supply.

Pollution of Palestinian water resources by sewage and toxic waste from settlements and Israeli industrial zones is commonplace.

(See fact sheets on the Environment, on Water Resources and on the Jordan Valley, available from PSC office.)

Discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel

The Palestinians who remained in their homes in 1948 now form 20% of Israel’s population — but they do not enjoy the same rights as Jewish Israelis.

They have citizenship, but not Israeli nationality. Israel’s Law of Return (1950) welcomes any Jew immigrating to Israel. But Palestinian refugees who fled in 1948 have never been allowed to return. This violates UN Resolution 194, which has repeatedly asserted the refugees’ right to return.

‘Land laws’ enabled the transfer of Palestinian refugee property to the state and to the Jewish National Fund (JNF). One of the early heads of the JNF estimated this to amount to more than 85 per cent of the total area of Israel. Result: the Palestinians who once owned over 90% of the land now own only 4% (source: The Jewish Telegraphic Agency). Under the 1950 Absentees’ Property Law, for example, any Palestinian who on the date of partition had left his/her place of residence, however temporarily, was classified as an ‘absentee’. Absentee property is vested in the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property who is authorised to



Racist message in Tel Aviv

‘sell’ the property to the Israeli Development Authority. Hence many Palestinian refugees, living in camps in abject poverty, can actually see their homes and land being used by Israelis.

Nowadays the growing Palestinian population of Israel is seen as a ‘demographic threat’, and ‘transfer’ (= ethnic cleansing) is openly discussed in the media, Israeli universities and in the Knesset.

Citizens of Palestinian origin are discriminated against in employment — for example they comprise only 3.7% of federal employees and 1% of university faculty positions. 42% of the Palestinian population live below the poverty line: although 20% of the population, they are allocated only 4% of the budget.

Over 100 Palestinian villages are unrecognised by the state. They pay full Israeli taxes yet are provided with very limited services and are unmarked on maps. Research conducted by Human Rights Watch on education in Israel revealed that: “often overcrowded and understaffed, poorly built, badly maintained or simply unavailable, schools for Palestinian children offer fewer facilities and educational opportunities than are offered to other Israeli children”.

Stifling dissent

Any political group which advocates amending Israel’s status as a Jewish state — in order for it to become a state for all its citizens — is forbidden by law from participating in elections. Palestinian Members of the Knesset who campaign for a more democratic system have been stripped of their parliamentary immunity and tried for subversion. Azmi Bishara, founder of the Balad party, now lives in exile.

A number of bills are currently before the Knesset: one would make advocating boycott illegal within Israel, and bar foreign nationals who do so from entry; another proposes closing down NGOs that are critical of Israeli policies, or that provide evidence in relation to war crimes.

Entrenched racism

The founding fathers of the Zionist movement planned the ethnic cleansing of the inhabitants of Palestine long before the establishment of the state of Israel. Theodor Herzl noted in his diary (June 1895): “The poorer section of the population we shall try to transfer across the border, without raising noise, by giving them employment in the transit countries, but in our own country we shall deny them work.” Joseph Weitz, later to come head of the Jewish National Land Fund, wrote in 1940: “There is no room for both peoples in this country... the only solution is Eretz Israel, without Arabs... We must not leave a single village, a single tribe.” Every subsequent government has furthered this aim, by the methods outlined above.

More recently Avigdor Lieberman, now Israel's Foreign Minister, said: “The vision I would like to see here is the entrenching of the Jewish and Zionist state... When there is a contradiction between democratic and Jewish values, the Jewish and Zionist values are more important.” (*The Scotsman*, 23 October 2006.)

South African parallels

John Dugard, South African professor of international law and the UN's chief human rights monitor in the Occupied Territories, said in 2007: “We had the old Group Areas Act in South Africa. East Jerusalem has territorial classification that has the same sort of consequences as race classification had in South Africa in respect of who you can marry, where you can live, where you can go to school or hospital.”

The South African apartheid state and the Zionist state share other similarities: settling in an ‘alien’ land; claiming biblical justification for occupation

and racial segregation; systematic violation of international law and UN resolutions; the attempt to create bogus, semi-autonomous ‘homelands’ for their victims; a history of shared military interests and endeavours, including nuclear and biological weapon technology; and a dismissive, contemptuous reaction to political opponents, who are simply labelled ‘terrorists’. However, the apartheid regime in South Africa wanted simply to control the black population – not actually expel them.

Apartheid can be defeated

Until 1986, both the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the US and UK followed a ‘constructive engagement’ policy with the apartheid government in South Africa, vetoing the imposition of UN economic sanctions. Thatcher declared the ANC a terrorist organisation, and in 1987 said that anyone who believed that the ANC would ever form the government of South Africa was “living in cloud cuckoo land”. Of course, apartheid did end, and the ANC was recognised. When Nelson Mandela came to Britain, the only person he refused to meet was Margaret Thatcher.

John Dugard wrote in his January 2007 report to the UN: “There are other regimes, particularly in the developing world, that suppress human rights, but there is no other case of a Western-affiliated regime that denies self-determination and human rights to a developing people and that has done so for so long. This explains why the Occupied Palestinian Territories has become a test for the West, a test by which its commitment to human rights is to be judged.”

Apartheid in South Africa only came to an end after the international community took effective measures to combat the discrimination and oppression. The international community must apply similar measures, such as boycott, divestment and sanctions, against this last remaining bulwark of Apartheid.

July 2010

What can you do?

- Join the PSC, by post or online
- Boycott Israeli goods, tourism, cultural and sporting events and academic institutions supporting the occupation
- Express your views to the media
- Write to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, your local MP or Euro MP to urge government action
- Write to the Israeli Embassy demanding an end to the occupation, to the blockade of Gaza and to Apartheid policies within Israel.

For full details of how to get involved, for further information on the historical and political background and for links to other organisations, see the PSC website: www.palestinecampaign.org

For boycott information: www.bigcampaign.org.uk

For a clear exposition of the key facts and concepts see Ben White's *Israeli Apartheid: A beginner's guide*

Palestine Solidarity Campaign
Box BM, PSA, London WC1N 3XX.
Phone: 020 7700 6192
email: info@palestinecampaign.org

