

## Palestine: Ending the injustice

One of the undoubted high points in the latter half of the 20th century was the international campaign against apartheid in South Africa. It was a campaign that saw millions of people from every corner of the globe stand up as one and say No to a system of structural racism and injustice organised and implemented as official state policy.

People with no personal, cultural or political connection to black South Africa dedicated themselves to ending this barbarism, proving in the process that our connection to one another as human beings transcends bonds of nationality, ethnicity, religion or culture.

Such was the momentum built over years of tireless campaigning that governments throughout the West were finally compelled to introduce economic sanctions against the South African government, which along with the courageous resistance of its victims over many long years eventually made apartheid unsustainable, leading to its collapse in the early '90s.

Today the state of Israel finds itself described as an apartheid state and the subject of a growing campaign to end what campaigners consider to be racist policies towards the Palestinian people – both those who live within its officially recognised borders and those currently under the most prolonged military occupation of modern times.

The latest in a long line of injustices uncovered towards the Palestinians is a recent report resulting from a fact-finding tour by a group of senior British lawyers into Israel's treatment of Palestinian child prisoners, which accuses the Israeli authorities of breaching the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of children.

Prior to 2002 identity cards carried by all Israeli citizens indicated the holder's ethnicity. Though this particular piece of information was erased due to its racist connotation, Israeli identification cards continue to differentiate between Jews and non-Jews via the birth date, which if Jewish is printed in Hebrew while if non-Jewish is omitted.

Moreover, Israel's ID system determines where so-called Israeli Arabs are allowed to live in the country, with Jewish-only neighbourhoods and communities increasingly common.

Within the Israeli city of Lod, for example, a wall has been built to separate Jewish from Palestinian residents, who make up 25 per cent of the city's population of around 70,000 people, with street cleaning and rubbish collection only provided for the city's Jewish neighbourhoods.

As if this isn't bad enough, if one of those Palestinian/Israeli Arab residents of Lod happens to fall in love with and marry a Palestinian living in the occupied territories, their spouse is prevented from moving to Lod by law.

With regard to the occupied territories, the situation is even worse. Here illegal Jewish settlements continue to be built and expanded with no end in sight.

Indeed, just recently the Netanyahu government announced the planned construction of 300 new homes in the West Bank for more settlers, of which currently there are in excess of half a million living on Palestinian land as adjudged by international law.

Accompanying these illegal settlements are a network of Jewish-only roads, a separate infrastructure and a hugely disproportionate access to necessities such as clean water compared with Palestinian towns and cities.

Israel justifies this state of affairs on the grounds of security, though the notion that any security risk towards residents of these Jewish-only settlements may have something to do with the fact they are built on land seized illegally from its rightful Palestinian owners is conveniently overlooked.

The Jewish National Fund, which enjoys charitable status in Britain, and of which the former prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were honorary patrons while in office – a position from which current incumbent David Cameron quietly resigned in 2011 – has come in for particular attention from campaigners.

The JNF throughout its history since it was formed in 1901 has played a key role in acquiring, maintaining, and securing land across Palestine for the exclusive use and enjoyment of Jews. This is racist by any other name.

The official campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel began in 2005 as a result of a call from Palestinian civil society, made up of over 170 community groups, cultural organisations, political parties, trade unions and campaigns. It represents the Palestinian refugees, residents of the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza, and Palestinians in Israel.

The call urges various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law by:

- Ending its occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the security wall
- Recognising the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality and
- Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

Since then it has attracted an impressive and growing list of supporters and endorsement from the likes of the Brazil's largest trade union the Unified Workers Central (CUT), both the Scottish and Irish Trades Union Congress, along with individual trade unions in South Africa, France, Sweden and Britain.

An international academic boycott has also grown in recent years, with Britain's University and College Union (UCU) leading the way despite strong opposition from supporters of Israel.

On the level of the cultural boycott, artists who have either refused to perform in Israel, attend events sponsored wholly or in part by the Israeli government or signed up the cultural boycott of Israel include Elvis Costello, Ken Loach, Carlos Santana, Gil Scott-Heron, Roger Waters, Alice Walker, Iain Banks and others.

In addition, many Israeli artists now refuse to perform at venues within illegal Jewish settlements and have signed up to the aims and objectives of the international boycott in general.

Other high-profile figures who accuse Israel of being an apartheid state are former US president Jimmy Carter and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who won the Nobel peace prize in 1984 for his part in the struggle against apartheid in South

Africa.

In his words, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."