

Palestine is not for sale!

Popular movement shuns attempts to curb resistance to the Apartheid Wall

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March 18th, 2005

Following the reports of Palestinian resistance during February and March, one cannot help but notice two striking features:

Firstly, that there has been wide-scale escalation of popular resistance confronting the ever intensifying Israeli Occupation and Apartheid, which has come to encompass all areas of the West Bank. Hebron, Beit Surik, Saffa, Ni'ilin and Budrus in particular, have been the scene of intense resistance over recent weeks. Moreover, the Ramallah demonstration on March 14th reflected the highpoint of mobilization against the Apartheid Wall currently happening across the West Bank.

Secondly, the Palestinian struggle has escalated against a backdrop of political developments, all which are designed to make Palestinians passive subjects while the racist colonization of the Apartheid Wall project continues unabated on their land. We can summarize these developments as; the Sharm al-Sheikh conference; the announcement by the Occupation Forces that they were making "modifications" to the Apartheid Wall; the conference in London and the increasingly obvious attitude of the United Nations which has chosen to pursue the issue of the Apartheid Wall in "humanitarian" terms.

There is no coincidence in this chain of recent events. To understand why struggle has intensified requires a consideration of the over-riding factor that permeates all recent political discourse and developments. That is the attempt to stifle Palestinian opposition to the Wall, and to shape its "normalization" into the demographics of the West Bank.

The issue of the Wall was negated in the Sharm el-Sheikh meetings, only surfacing in a meek joint statement noting it to be a "controversial issue". Furthermore, the outcome of the conference stressed the need for a "calming" period in Palestinian resistance and activity. This was expected to occur while the Apartheid Wall and the settlements continued to expand. Indeed, the Occupation Forces have used the de-facto impasse to pick up the pace of its "third phase" of the Wall, which started in the south during November 2004. Particular fervor has gone into construction of the Apartheid Wall around Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The rhetoric of "calming down" and "ceasefire" (which assumes Palestinians and the Zionists are in war, and as if Palestinians do not confront their violence as people under Occupation), which does not deal with the Apartheid Wall and settlement construction as part of Israeli violence has no meaning. The implementation of the ICJ decision - for the dismantlement of the Wall - is not a negotiable or controversial issue but forms the basis of international law.

By undermining the ICJ decision, and consolidating US/European desires to see a re-routing of the Wall's path, the Occupation Government announced a "modification" plan. Although some changes in the Wall route were made in individual villages, the Wall and its network of Jewish-only settlements and roads and military zones continues as before in the rest of the West Bank, annexing some 47% of it. It will still leave Palestinians in ghettos or semi-ghettos, linked together with tunnels and bridges under Occupation control. What is new in this fresh Wall route is that it is done under the title of a "disengagement plan" approved by Americans and Europeans who seem to consider it as part of the "road map".

The Palestinian people were alert to the false impressions the Occupation Forces were attempting to create around its colonial project, which seeks to impose Apartheid upon them from the top. They realized how the Wall draws the features of the final settlement before

even beginning negotiations. They totally reject the notion that isolated ghettos being created across the West Bank refer to any kind of “viable state”. That the Wall is the bulldozer and catalyst of the expansionist Zionist colonial project in Palestine, is not hard to discern for Palestinians who have experienced decades of colonialism and destruction of livelihoods, dignity and communities.

It has now been over a year since the opening session of the ICJ, and more than 8 months since its decision that the Wall should be halted and dismantled. While it was expected that Israel would reject the decision (it has never been prepared to abide by international law), it was more surprising that the call for the implementation of the ICJ decision had started to dissipate from official PA discourse. The Wall is pushed into the background as if it is just an illusion in the Palestinian consciousness. For the Europeans and Americans, the issue has been the Wall’s path and not the Wall itself. Thus, the ICJ decision appears to have been annulled by all parties, except for the Palestinian people (the affected people), who are using every possible occasion to call for the respect of international law, and the full implementation of the ICJ decision.

The process to normalize the Apartheid Wall - in contempt of international law - has been a discourse increasingly evident in the UN which prefers to treat it as a “humanitarian”, and not political, issue. On his visit to the West Bank Kofi Annan reiterated previous UN announcements that a damage register office would be established for those affected by the Wall. This move is highly alarming in a context where UN pressure on Israel to stop the Apartheid Wall is completely missing. Is it money instead of respect for international law the UN seeks to provide for the Palestinian people? Moreover, the wealth of reports and statements by UN officials all emphasize the humanitarian implications, ignoring the real issue of the Wall’s existence, thus serving to legitimize the de-facto construction of the Apartheid Wall.

The concrete ramifications of the sell out of the Palestinian people, land and struggle had its debut in the Conference held in London last month. Foreign ministers, the World Bank and Annan met with officials of the Palestinian Authority to lecture about “internal reforms”, “security matters” and, above all, money. Up to \$1.2 billion has been promised to the Palestinian authority. This was slightly more than the minimum amount (\$900 million) calculated by the World Bank in its report of December 2004 which appeared to be a do-it-yourself guide book on how to administer an entire people in an open air prison with detailed analysis of the financial necessities of life behind the Apartheid Wall. The bottleneck of the World Bank feasibility study – the hi-tech gates in the Apartheid Wall – has been solved with the Bank volunteering to stump up the money and it is now competing with a US standing offer to fund the project. However, despite the meticulous calculations of the world’s most important finance experts, and the “generosity” of the donor community – the Palestinian people are not putting their land and lives for sale.

The Palestinian popular resistance has responded to these developments with escalating grassroots mobilization in various locations. In Jerusalem the people of Beit Hanina, Beit Surik, Biddu, Dahya and Ram struggle against the Wall being built to isolate Jerusalem from the West Bank. Land has been confiscated for settlement expansion and the Judaization of Jerusalem in a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing.

The third phase of the Wall has led to further construction and land confiscation in Hebron, Yatta and the Old City, and in turn catalyzed residents into struggle against the Apartheid Wall.

In West Ramallah, and in Saffa and Bil’in clashes have emerged on a daily basis over the last two weeks with Palestinians shot at, injured, detained and tear gassed.

The demonstration on March 14th 2005, organized by the Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, was the crowning moment in a “month of continuous struggle”. The huge attendance of people in the demonstration, from all areas of the West Bank, reflected the popular movement against the Wall. Slogans and statements revealed the deep anger of the people at the unrelenting construction of the Apartheid Wall, and widespread opposition to political developments designed to demobilize and pacify resistance to the Occupation.

Rejection of the deceitful “modifications to the Wall”, were emphasized in calls for the restoration of international law and dismantlement of the Wall. Criticism was also directed at the official PA position and discourse which has not sought to use the ICJ decision.

However, it was Annan, and the branches of the UN in Palestine, which received the lion’s share of people’s anger on March 14th. Annan failed to utter one word about the necessity to respect international law, and his focus on the register office, suggested the issue is humanitarian and can be solved with few dollars. Moreover, the recent OCHA report came to the same conclusion. The inability to treat the Apartheid Wall as a political issue – one that is intrinsic to the Zionist colonial project for the West Bank – is a deeply disturbing development within the United Nations.

What Annan and the UN have stated simply mirrors the rhetoric of the Zionists. They to consider the issue as “humanitarian”, and show “understanding” to deal with it! They too act in contempt of the ICJ decision as does Annan and the UN report. We are left to ponder - what exactly is the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the United Nations? Is it to adopt the Israeli–American position in relation to UN decisions, founded on a basis of double standards? Or is it to facilitate the implementation of international law, and support the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle for justice, sovereignty and freedom.

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