

**UNITED IN STRUGGLE:
Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights
Advocacy Initiative (OPGAI)**

Joint Statement and Call for Action

**Presented to the
2005 World Social Forum
by the OPGAI Steering Committee**

END THE ISRAELI MILITARY OCCUPATION

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, are part of the Palestinian and Arab people who have struggled for decades against colonization and a military occupation imposed upon us by Jewish settlers via the Zionist Movement and the state of Israel.

We are part of the worldwide movement of people involved in the struggle for justice, equality and freedom of the oppressed and marginalized, and have come to the World Social Forum with a clear agenda: we wish to share with you our analysis of the root cause of this protracted conflict in Palestine and - based on common understanding - gain your effective support of our ongoing struggle.

What Is Our Struggle About?

The root cause of the protracted conflict in the Middle East is the denial of the right of the indigenous Palestinian-Arab people to live and develop freely in our land - i.e. the right to self-determination - through the imposition of a state in 1948. The state of Israel was built by immigrants for their own exclusive benefit. In this sense, it is not a 'normal colonial state' built through the exploitation of local resources and indigenous labor. Israel defines itself as 'a state for the Jewish people' only.

Zionist-Israeli policy from the early 20th century until today has aimed to TAKE CONTROL OF THE LAND and to EXCLUDE its indigenous people. Israel is a COLONIAL APARTHEID state.

Conquest of the land and the exclusion of the Palestinian-Arab people have been accomplished through a variety of policies and practices initially applied inside the territory of the state of Israel (i.e. 1949 ceasefire lines). Similar measures have been duplicated on the Palestinian and Arab land occupied by Israel in 1967, i.e. the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights. These include:

REFUGEES' RIGHT TO RETURN (i.e. ethnic cleansing): There are some 6 million Palestinian refugees including their descendents from the wars of 1948 and 1967. Israel illegally expropriated their lands and homes, as well as the property of some 500,000 Syrian Arabs and their descendents expelled from the Golan Heights in 1967. Today these refugees comprise the majority of the Palestinian people.

INDUCING PEOPLE TO LEAVE BECAUSE THEIR DAILY LIVES BECOME UNBEARABLE: In 37 years of Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, some 20,000 Palestinian homes and refugee shelters have been demolished and some 600,000 Palestinians have been detained for various periods of time. During the current intifada alone (2000-2004) at least 3,300 Palestinians, 600 of which were children, have been killed and over 27,000 injured by Israeli soldiers and settlers. Public and private infrastructure has been destroyed. Several hundred thousand citrus trees have been uprooted. Palestinians face severe restrictions on their freedom of movement and access to land and water. These measures have accelerated a process of economic de- development.

JEWISH MAJORITY IN PALESTINE: This includes the encouragement of Jewish immigration; construction of 'Jewish only' colonies ('settlements') on land illegally taken from

Palestinian farmers (e.g. some 430,000 settlers have been transferred to some 227 Jewish-only colonies in the occupied West Bank, eastern Jerusalem and Gaza Strip); unilateral annexation of occupied land without the inclusion of its native inhabitants (eastern Jerusalem, Golan Heights); enactment of immigration, citizenship and land laws which deprive the indigenous Palestinian-Arab inhabitants and land owners of their rights to their nationality and their land, and the transfer of these rights to the Jewish people/state of Israel for their exclusive benefit.

PEOPLE and the PEOPLE FROM THEIR LAND: Since 1948 'closed military zones' and permit/pass regimes have been enforced in all areas for this purpose. Permanent military checkpoints which were put in place in 1993, construction of Israel's Apartheid Wall which began in 2002 and Israel's 'unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip' scheduled for 2005 are more recent, physical and visual expressions of the same policy.

STRUGGLE: Propaganda campaigns and deliberate misinformation and distortions of the facts about the situation in Palestine have accompanied the Zionist-Israeli conquest since its inception. The most notorious slogan described Palestine as 'a land without people for a people without land'. Today Zionist-Israeli propaganda deliberately employs western Islamophobia and the 'war against terror', the need to justify war and occupation in Iraq, as well as concern about anti-Semitism, in order to install fear and misinformation about the Palestinian-Arab struggle among western academia, media, policy makers and the public.

Where Are We Today?

The successful implementation of the policies and practices summarized above would not have been possible without the political backing and support provided by western powers including Britain and the United States. Our collective struggle has brought achievements. Today we are recognized as a people with rights. Hundreds of United Nations resolutions have affirmed our rights, condemned Israel's colonial and discriminatory policies as illegal under international law and called upon Israel to provide effective remedy. In 2004 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) affirmed these rights and called upon Israel to provide effective remedies. However, many governments, the United Nations and the European Union have remained unwilling to apply political measures that could bring about Israeli compliance. Israel continues to operate outside and above the law.

The process of colonization, occupation and entrenchment of the apartheid-like system in Palestine and the Golan Heights thus CONTINUES AT A RAPID PACE and the OPPORTUNITY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONALLY-FAVORED TWO-STATE SOLUTION MAY WELL HAVE BEEN MISSED FOREVER. Diplomatic efforts to bring about - with Israeli consent - the end of military occupation and the establishment of a sovereign and viable Palestinian state in the 1967 occupied West Bank, eastern Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip via the 'Oslo peace process' and the 'Road Map' have failed. US-sponsored Israeli-Syrian negotiations also failed to bring about peace based on Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. So-called 'new windows of opportunity' for a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace are empty rhetoric in a climate where the struggle for basic rights, justice and freedom is increasingly challenged and discredited in Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere.

CALL FOR ACTION

Today the Palestinian people and the Syrian people of the occupied Golan do not enjoy basic protection by governments or the United Nations who have the responsibility and obligation to stop forceful conquest, occupation and apartheid and facilitate just remedies and solutions. Global civil society, grassroots movements and NGOs, have thus remained our only ally.

We therefore appeal to the participants at this World Social Forum to undertake urgent and broad action in order to help end the current situation in Palestine and bring about a new era in which the indigenous people can return to their land and properties and are compensated for damages and suffering incurred, and in which all people in Palestine can freely exercise their basic individual and collective rights in the framework of one or two sovereign states in line with their choice.

In particular, we call upon participants at this World Social Forum to focus individual and collective efforts on:

DEVELOPING PUBLIC INFORMATION AND AWARENESS- RAISING CAMPAIGNS WHICH CAN EFFECTIVELY CHALLENGE ZIONIST-ISRAELI PROPAGANDA conflict; highlight discrimination caused by Israel's exclusive Jewish character and policies, the ongoing character of Palestinian- Arab forced displacement and dispossession and refugees' right to return, restitution and compensation; Syrian Golan Heights.

BUILDING A BROAD ISRAEL BOYCOTT-DIVESTMENT-SANCTIONS CAMPAIGN inspired by the model of the South-African anti-apartheid campaign: aimed at public boycott (e.g. consumer boycott of Israeli products, non-cooperation with Israeli initiatives in the field of culture, education and sports), divestment (e.g. de-investment by private companies and public institutions from Israeli institutions and/or stocks and bonds) and pressuring governments to impose sanctions on Israel. Choose initiatives which fit your local environment and link up with similar initiatives worldwide.

BUILDING LOGAL SUPPORT NETWORKS for activists, journalists, teachers and politicians who are brave to speak out for Palestinian rights and threatened by Zionist lobby organizations.

COORDINATE WITH PALESTINIAN/ARAB CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: activities with Palestinian civil society organizations in Palestine (including those located in pre-1948 Palestine now Israel) and in exile and with Syrian civil society organizations in the Golan Heights.

**'UNITED IN STRUGGLE' - OPGAI
FREE PALESTINE NOW
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Prepared by the members of OPGAI:

Alternative Tourism Group, atg@p-ol.com

BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, info@badil.org

Defense for Children International/Palestine Section, george@dci-pal.org

The Joint Advocacy Initiative (incorporating YWCA of Palestine and The East Jerusalem YMCA,

advocacy@ej-ymca.org

Environmental Education Center, eec@p-ol.com

Golan for Development, taiser@jawlan.org

Ibdaa Cultural Center, ziadabbas@yahoo.com

Jerusalem Center for Women, jcw@palnet.com

Palestinian Grass-roots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, jamal@stopthewall.org

For additional information about OPGAI activities at the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, see: www.badil.org (Upcoming Activities) and www.stopthewall.org or contact: solomuzi@ej-ymca.org

For coordination at the WSF in Porto Alegre, please contact:
elisa@stopthewall.org