



Sadaka Second High-level Forum

Israeli Apartheid: Developing Ireland's Strategy

March 2022

Session 2: Apartheid in practice: ethnic cleansing, population transfer and segregation.

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Apartheid – the Lived Reality

Chair: Mona Sabella, Sadaka.

I want to start really by thanking Sadaka for this wonderful conference and for the great effort that has been put to make it happen. It's a great opportunity to be with you, I'm sorry we have to speak from distance. I want to thank especially Michael Lynk and Rania Muhareb for the great presentations they have made which I think would be fantastic documents that should be used in our struggle against apartheid.

My comments will concentrate on five or six specific points, the first of which is that apartheid is not new. Some people think that apartheid started only recently. I think apartheid is very much linked to the issue of Zionism and that is something that many people try to avoid but the reality is that Zionism is basically a theory of apartheid, a theory of establishing that racist system. It is based on racial discrimination, on claiming that the land of Palestine belongs only to Jewish people and it has translated this approach into the practical, ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, of the indigenous population in this land.

I don't think I need to go through much history. The Nakba led to the forcing of 70% of the Palestinian population out of their land in 1948 and in 1967 Israel completed the land occupation of all Palestine. And since then, since the very beginning, we've been living through a settler-colonial regime as has already been described very well.

My second point is that apartheid is practised not only against people in the occupied territory, but actually all over Palestine and outside Palestine against Palestinian refugees.

The third point is that apartheid is not a static situation. Apartheid is an escalating and growing process. We've seen recently lots of things that indicate this, not only the acts of ethnic cleansing that are practised on a daily basis in the West Bank and also in certain areas in 1948 Israel, but the presentation and the approval of the Nation State Law which is a very clear confirmation of the apartheid approach, and most recently the law that prevents family reunification of Palestinians. That is a most recent law that consolidates the system of apartheid and we are talking here about preventing families from living with each other, preventing a man or a woman who is from 1948 Israel or from Jerusalem, from living with a spouse if they are from the West Bank or any other place. And this is a totally inhuman law, but it has just been approved recently.

Another set of laws are used to prevent Palestinians from ownership of Palestinian land. Let me remind you that when Israel was established in 1948 Palestinians owned about 82% of the land. Today they own inside 1948 Israel no more than 3%. The same process now is happening in the West Bank where Palestinians are losing their land on a daily basis and they use so many different systems for that. But, a very important indicator here is that Area C, which is 62% of the land of the West Bank including east Jerusalem, is under full Israeli military and civil control and that is where the attrition of the land is taking place and continuing.

One very interesting example concerns water. Today most Palestinian cities in the West Bank are deprived of water. 85% actually of the whole of the West Bank is controlled by Israel and that is translated into the fact that Palestinians in the area are allowed to use no more than 50m³ of water per year, while an Israeli settler, an illegal settler in the West Bank, can use up to 1,450m³ per year. So, practically we are talking about a discriminatory system that goes into land ownership, that goes into freedom of movement, that goes into access to water resources and so on and so forth.

Although the GDP per capita is more than \$46,000 per capita for Israel and it's less than \$3,000 per capita for Palestinians, and less than \$1,000 per capita by the way for Palestinians in Gaza, we are still obliged to pay the same prices for all the products because of an imposed market union and tax union. Add to that the fact that we are obliged in the West Bank to pay double the price for electricity and double the price for water, in comparison to what Israel is paying.

Another example is medical treatment. If a Palestinian is forced to go to be treated in an Israeli hospital we are obliged by Israeli law to pay four times what Israelis would usually pay. The suffering, let me tell you, as a medical doctor, there are no words for me to describe how difficult and how painful it is for patients with serious diseases like cancer or chronic heart disease who are in need of treatment and cannot get it, not only in Israeli hospitals but they are not able to get it even in other Palestinian hospitals, particularly in the case of Gaza. A third example which is rarely mentioned, is the fact that Israel exploits Palestinian workers. At this very moment, Israel is employing about 200,000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank and now they want to increase the number of Palestinian workers from Gaza to 20,000. That represents very cheap labour force for Israel that is exploited and I think that is a very similar situation to what happened in South Africa during the apartheid era.

A very important issue is the absence of security. A Palestinian does not enjoy any form of security, whether we talk about security for their life or security for their land, or security for their property or security for daily living. Arrests and imprisonment is another example. Since 1967 it is estimated that Israel conducted no less than 1,000,000 arrests of Palestinians in the occupied territories. Hundreds of thousands of them are discriminated against in Israel prisons.

We are talking here about broken lives. I mean, I cannot describe to you how many thousand families and people have had their lives broken because of all the Israeli obstruction, how many people could not get married, how many people could not finish their education because Israel prevented them from going back to their schools, how many have trained as doctors but not became doctors because they are prevented from leaving. I remember, when I studied medicine, I could not come home for several years because I was worried that if I come home I may not be able to leave again.

In the case of the Dead Sea there is only a very little spot which Palestinians can go to. But they can use it only till 4pm, after 4pm it becomes a Jewish-only area and the rest, of course, of the Dead Sea is off-limits for all Palestinians.

My fourth point is about the actual process of fragmentation: separating Gaza from the West Bank, separating Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and then fragmenting the West Bank itself. Today, the West Bank is divided into 224 small ghettos, small Bantustans. And they are separated by no less than 642 military check points at the moment in the West Bank, and also by segregated roads which are only for Israelis. If a Palestinian is caught using any of these roads he could be jailed for 6 months.

A fifth process that is used against Palestinians is a very important process actually and that is to criminalise the Palestinian struggle. Not only to criminalise the Palestinian struggle, but actually dehumanise Palestinians as human beings. We see that in the prevailing Israeli narrative. The most painful thing is when you hear some European partners or some governments worldwide adopting the Israeli narrative.

Where a Palestinian is either a terrorist or a violent man, even if he or she practices non-violent resistance; where anybody who supports Palestinians in their struggle is described as antisemitic. I think you are all very familiar with that, but in my opinion the dehumanisation of Palestinians and the criminalisation of our right to resist injustice is by itself a very important aspect of this terrible system of apartheid.

And I think it is very important here to mention, that you cannot be a Zionist and not be part of this discriminatory system. I have to be frank here, and that's why I am very surprised that parties like Labour Party or Meretz join this Israeli government which is consolidating the system of apartheid on a daily basis against Palestinians.

The international community also is a participant in this, to be honest with you.

Let me remind you that the whole idea of the peace process and the two state solution was all based on what they called a compromise, and unfortunately what Palestinians accepted as a compromise, agreeing to have a state in 22% only of the historic Palestine. This was rejected by Israel but if we look at the history of the process, it is very important to note that since 1993 once the Oslo Agreement was signed, this whole process, this whole agreement, was only used as a way of giving Israel time to finish the build-up of the system of apartheid. It was used to make Israeli occupation less costly. Actually, to make the Israeli operation profitable.

Let me give you an example. When the Palestinian Authority was established about 70% of its costs of operations came from the international community. Gradually this declined. Today, it's not the international community that is paying the cost of occupation, but we the occupied people are the ones who are paying the cost of apartheid and the cost of occupation. With our land, with our labour force but also with the Palestinian government budget 90% of which comes from Palestinian tax payers. So, in a way there was a transitional period when the international community paid for occupation, and now it is Palestinians themselves that have to pay for their own occupation and to make the apartheid system and the occupation comfortable for the Israelis.

The most recent process of normalisation between some Arab countries and Israel is also helping to consolidate the system of apartheid.

I think we have enough documentation today, we have enough records, we have enough videos that show very clearly that this is a system of apartheid and a system of settler-colonial occupation and we don't need to provide more proof of that. It is clear for anybody who wants to see the reality.

A question here that was raised, and I appreciate it, I think by Senator Black, is what is to be done about this?

It's not just enough to recognise the presence of apartheid, but the question is how do we get rid of it and how do we deal with the situation? And I want here to emphasise that the similarity between the system of apartheid that prevails now in Palestine and of the one that was created in Algeria during the French colonisation, and in South Africa during the apartheid system there, in both cases nothing could change without changing the balance of power. Nothing could change without changing the disparity in power between the two sides and that's why I believe and we believe here in Palestine that the only way to change the situation, is to really fix this disparity in power and that can happen in our opinion through a strategy that is based on six pillars.

The first of these is to strengthen the steadfastness and the continuation of the presence of Palestinians on the land of Palestine. This is very important because it is the fact that prevents Israel from completing its project. The fact that the number of Palestinians on the land of Palestine today is larger than the number Jewish Israelis is by itself a very important factor which is really the only thing that is preventing the Zionist movement from fulfilling its full project.

So, strengthening the presence of Palestinians here in every possible way whether we talk about health care or the economy or agriculture or human rights is very important.

The second point is of course resistance. Popular resistance here is a very important factor, without which we will not be able to change the balance of power. That means supporting Palestinian resistance to this system, not only of the occupation but the system of apartheid as well.

The third point is of course Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions. That is a very important movement; that is the main international instrument that should be used to change the reality on the ground and here I think it is important to note and emphasise the great hypocrisy and the great double standard that we see today. We see the number of sanctions that are imposed on Russia today, or that has been imposed on other countries whether it's Iran or Venezuela, in comparison to what is done to Israel. Israel is not

only not sanctioned, but also it is actually encouraged to continue this system. I think this comparison is very important today. There is an opportunity here. We have an opportunity that could be used to enhance and empower the BDS movement worldwide.

The fourth point is of course Palestinian unity. It is our responsibility actually to recreate Palestinian internal unity based on a programme to bring down apartheid. Unity between all Palestinian groups, to end this terrible internal division and to find a way of creating a unified Palestinian leadership.

The fifth point is that it's very important to note that all the reports that we have seen, especially the last report of Amnesty International, indicate very clearly that we have to reunify and reunite Palestinians wherever they live. We're talking here not about the struggle of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza separate from that of Palestinian refugees abroad who must continue their struggle to have the right of return, or from the struggle of Palestinians in 1948 Israel who are considered Israeli citizens. I think the unity of the struggle of all these components is a very important part of the future strategy.

The sixth pillar is, in my opinion, that we have to really break into the circles of those who support Israel. And here I think bringing the right narrative and emphasising the moral responsibility of the international community regarding what's happening in Palestine is a very important component of our struggle.

We believe that this strategy can really lead to a significant change and can help us in fixing this terrible disparity and in ending this system of apartheid. Let me tell you here, that I personally believe that what you are doing today is very important and we are getting into the right approach and we are moving into the right direction.

One last point: I know we are suffering a lot. I know we have very difficult tasks that are in front of us, but one thing should be always remembered: the Palestinian people, whether they live here in the West Bank, in Gaza or in Jerusalem, the Palestinians who live in 1948 Israel, or the Palestinians who live in the diaspora, will never, ever accept being enslaved by a system of apartheid and discrimination. This will never happen and those who think they can break us up are totally mistaken. The people here are very determined and the people here will struggle for their freedom, whatever it takes.

Thank you again for this wonderful conference and best regards to all of you.