



Sadaka Second High-level Forum

Israeli Apartheid: Developing Ireland's Strategy

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Session 3: Developing a Coherent International Response to Apartheid.

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What is a coherent response to apartheid in Palestine and internationally?

Chair: Caoimhe de Barra, CEO, Trócaire.

I'm sorry I couldn't be with you in person, I am speaking to you from Jerusalem.

I was asked to talk about a coherent response to apartheid both in Palestine and internationally. I will focus more on Palestine because otherwise I will repeat a lot of what Daniel just said. I will start by saying there is not a single Palestinian with whom you will have a conversation who will not bring Ukraine into the conversation. For every single Palestinian I speak to there is a very deep sense of bitterness at the complete incoherence of the response of the world, especially the West, the United States and Europe when it comes to their response to the occupation in Ukraine, the current territorial aggression and the attempts at annexin territory compared to the reactions when it comes to Palestine and Israel's colonialism, apartheid and occupation.

It is really about the double standards that are very clearly set out and the lack of will for coherence on the part of Europe and the United States. When one is inserting some values, some principles, some international order, one must implement them everywhere in the same way and not simply base them on one's friendships and alliances. This is very deeply felt by Palestinians now. As Daniel said it is also something that can be built on.

The normalising that is happening around boycotting, around specific sanctions, around accountability is something that we really need to work on and to build on, to make sure that Europeans face up to their own incoherence including when it comes to welcoming refugees in their own territories.

This is the main response that Palestinians want from the international community. It is not about charity; it is not about money; it is not about economics; it is not about trying to bring specific corrective measures; it is about ending the complicity with apartheid. This must be very central to any international policy today and tomorrow. It is about how one looks at one's own interventions; how one looks at one's own policies; how one looks at one's own international relationships, especially with the state of Israel, in order not to be complicit with apartheid, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Palestinians realise that it is not for Europeans or Americans to liberate Palestinians. It is very much for ourselves, including cleaning up our own house, but in order to do that, there are many obstacles that need to be removed and I think the apartheid framework allows that very clear path to be taken. There is a risk of normalising apartheid. We must be very vigilant here.

We in Palestine and internationally have internalised 30 years of the Oslo paradigm. By that I mean that there is a generation of us who have grown up with the belief that Palestinians would be given a state on the '67 borders or be granted rights in a separate state on the '67 borders; that there was a peace process, that we would just have to get around a table (again) and dialogue, that we would have to build trust with each other. That narrative and that paradigm is very anchored, internationally, but also in Palestine. We need to deconstruct it now, and therefore the apartheid framing is very much needed and important. It automatically clarifies that very incoherence and that very cognitive dissonance between what we are saying is apartheid, a reality from the river to the sea that is one of domination by one people over another, in contrast to the response that is still being given to us that "Yes, but you have to get around the table and negotiate with your oppressor, with the one who is committing the crime of apartheid.

This is what is happening now: there is a cognitive dissonance and to some extent it is accepted. We need to work to make sure that after recognizing the reality, after normalising the discourse that this is apartheid, that the response to it is coherent and fits the analysis.

Unfortunately, we are currently in a time where even those that are sometimes willing to recognise the diagnosis are not ready to take the steps that are needed to end it.

It is very positive that the Irish Parliament has recognised the reality of de facto annexation. This is a step towards recognising apartheid. (It is worth saying that once you recognise de facto annexation, which is a war crime, there are consequences and international responsibilities which flow from that).

The rapid response to Russia's aggression is felt very strongly by Palestinians because, even when a country like Ireland recognises de facto annexation, there are no consequences. The actual consequences are that the government is rebuilding its relationship with the Israeli government. And so, there is an incoherence now which needs to be de-constructed. Normalising the discourse and the narrative of apartheid must go hand in hand with making sure we don't build incoherent consequences to it. Once we have recognised the reality of apartheid, the consequences need to be consistent with that.

We need a national movement to fight apartheid. What we have at the moment is a Palestinian body politic that is very much sticking to the Oslo paradigm and so is trapped into accepting the apartheid regime and the political framing offered by Oslo. Obviously there needs to be a new Palestinian movement and leadership. The obstacles to political change in Palestine and within Palestinian society stem from the support of the United States, the Europeans and also now some Gulf states for the status quo, namely keeping the Palestinian Authority and leadership as it is and making sure that the system that exists now is "too big to fail". The economy we live under is an apartheid economy; Gaza is under siege; Palestinians in Jerusalem are separated and the PA has been given a limited autonomy to try to maintain this existence and sense of normalcy within this little Island surrounded by settlements and surrounded by a sea of Israeli sovereignty.

This is very difficult to change: the infrastructure, the economy, the roads, the war...all of these are very real. They are not just political talking points; they are a reality that people live every single day. People have permits from Israel to go to work so all this reality, this sophisticated, bureaucratic reality, these associated economic factors that had been built into the apartheid regime are really entrenched and will take a long time to be deconstructed and dismantled. And so, I think this is also where the international community has a responsibility to remove the obstacles for Palestinians to be able to renew their leadership and political body and be able to confront the paradigm and the reality of apartheid that is in front of them.

And how is this to be done? Obviously, many Palestinian activists and the younger generation of people would like to enter politics. This is very high risk as people are being arrested, harassed, digitally surveilled, and killed.

European and western governments provide support and comfort for Israel by facilitating and normalising the regime and its policies. They are complicit in maintaining this and in creating obstacles to Palestinians building a new political reality.

Ireland could lead a new coalition of the willing that could really challenge Israel. Of course, Israel doesn't want to see this happening. For Palestinians to be able to organize themselves, for political reality to change, means ending the complicity when it comes to arms trade with Israel, military cooperation, police cooperation, security cooperation, with Israel; and it means ending trade with settlements in occupied territories. More broadly, sanctioning Israel is very important. That means being very vigilant when it comes to harmful technologies, cyber warfare, or any of the Israeli technologies that have been the bread and butter of its diplomacy. Also looking at, and helping remove, obstacles to Palestinian political renewal is very important.

Finally, I want to go back to the idea of recognising the reality. The main added value that this apartheid framework and settler-colonial framework bring to the table (and again it is not new for Palestinians; Palestinians have been talking about settler-colonialism for a very long time) is the fact that it really means for us working on a unified struggle.

Unity is our present and our future, It requires heavy amounts of effort against the fragmentation that is being imposed on us and which is one of the key components of the apartheid regime. It helps us understand that from the river to the sea the Palestinian people are one, and that our struggle including with Palestinian refugees, Palestinians, in exile and the diaspora, Palestinians living in Haifa and Yafa, in Gaza, in Jerusalem or in the West Bank, are all one people and our political future is one that needs to be united.

This is very challenging. Last year has helped break the barriers of fear that Yara talked about and brings forward that willingness to work on unity and that refusal to go back to having fragmentation imposed on us. That will require a heavy amount of investment. Why? Because we cannot go to Gaza. I have not been in Gaza since 2003 and young generations of Gazans have never met with young generations of people in the West Bank and all of the other geographic and social fragments that have been imposed on us. It is for us to really work on building up unity, building the same political language, building joint aspirations. That is very important, and it must be the core of what the Palestinian political movement should look like.

It is very challenging because, again, the international community and the PA have accepted the framing of a Palestinian authority that affectively has accepted some limited control over only a few small islands detached from each other and which has excluded most Palestinian, including Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinian refugees.

I will conclude by saying that it is very important for people to understand what apartheid means for those experiencing it.

Particular attention must be paid to centering Palestinian voices from 1948, Palestinians who are now citizens of Israel, Palestinian refugees, and the wider Palestinian diaspora. This is important because for 30 years the Oslo paradigm created an understanding of Palestinians and Palestine that includes only the West Bank and Gaza. It is important to recenter the identity, the existence and the centrality of all Palestinians wherever they are to debunk the sophisticated and continuous arguments from Israel claiming that it is a democracy in which Palestinians can be judges, actors and pharmacists and that arguments to the contrary are antisemitic.

Thank you.