

Political developments in 2011

At the beginning of 2011, an election was in the offing and there was no need for a crystal ball to foresee that Fianna Fail, which had been in government for over a decade, was going to be heavily defeated at the polls. Historically, Fianna Fail has taken the lead in Ireland in supporting the rights of Palestinians (see Sadaka paper *Palestine in Irish Politics: A History* [\[1\]](#)) and we were a little anxious that the incoming government, which was bound to be led by Fine Gael, would be less assertive on the matter.

We are delighted to say that our anxiety was misplaced and that the Fine Gael/Labour coalition that came to power in February 2011, with the Labour leader, Eamon Gilmore, as Tánaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade, has moved Irish policy forward significantly on the issue, in three respects.

Obstacles to peace: military occupation and colonisation

First, in response to the Palestinian UN initiative, the Minister dispensed with the usual “balanced” statements and singled out Israel’s military occupation and colonisation of Palestinian territories as the root of the problem in the Middle East.

Here’s what he said in answer to a question in Dáil Éireann on 13 July 2011:

“The continuing Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories is at the heart of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict. The issues which have been critical for Israel for most of its history – the existence of the state of Israel and its right to live in peace and security – have for many years been accepted in principle by most Arab and Palestinian opinion. It is the continuing occupation, and the creation and growth of illegal settlements on the occupied lands, which are now the major obstacles to peace.

“I consider it an urgent priority objective, both for Ireland and the EU, to help achieve the end of the occupation and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, living in peace alongside Israel. This has been the consistent view of Irish Governments since 1980. It is long overdue, and it remains my view that there should be a state of Palestine, and very soon.” [\[2\]](#)

No Irish government has been as forthright as that before.

Ireland supports Palestinian UN initiative

Second, in September 2011 the Government committed itself to voting in the UN General Assembly for UN membership for Palestine or, failing that, for observer rights for Palestine as a “non-member state”.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly on 26 September 2011, Eamon Gilmore said:

“The decision of President Abbas to seek Palestine’s membership of the United Nations is entirely legitimate and understandable. Palestine has the same right to membership of the United Nations as Ireland or any other Member of this Organisation. Some would seek to argue that Palestine cannot be recognised as a State because its borders remain to be agreed. But if the borders of Palestine are still a matter for negotiation, then so, by definition, are those of Israel which is rightly a full member of the UN.

“Membership of the UN of itself, however, would not change the unstable and unacceptable situation on the ground. ... What recognition of Palestinian statehood would do, however, would be to give dignity and support to the Palestinian people who have suffered for too long.
...

“The day will come, not too far off, when the General Assembly will be asked to vote on a proposal to admit Palestine as a member of this Organisation or perhaps, as an interim step towards the achievement of that goal, to accord Palestine non-member observer state status. Provided that the resolution is drafted in terms that are reasonable and balanced, I expect Ireland to give its full support.” [\[3\]](#)

Since, thanks to US pressure, the Security Council failed to make a recommendation for UN membership for Palestine to the General Assembly, the opportunity to vote for it in the General Assembly hasn’t arisen.

At the time of writing, it is expected that a General Assembly resolution will be proposed in the near future giving Palestine observer rights as a “non-member state”. We anticipate that Ireland will vote for such a resolution.

Ireland supports EU ban on settlement goods

A third development has been the Irish Government’s commitment to support an EU ban on the import of settlement goods. This new policy stance was first revealed by Eamon Gilmore in response to a letter from Sadaka, Christian Aid and EAPPI and he has subsequently confirmed it in parliamentary answers.

Asked by Pádraig Mac Lochlainn of Sinn Fein, “if he supports the exclusion from the EU of produce from Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories”, the Minister told Dáil Éireann on 25 October 2011:

“The Government’s firm views on the establishment and continued expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are clear and well known. I would support any move at EU level to exclude settlement products from entry to the EU. However, it is clear that such a proposal would not at this point have any prospect of commanding sufficiently wide support.” [\[4\]](#)

In a later question on 2 November 2011, Pádraig Mac Lochlainn asked the Minister “if he will initiate a discussion at EU level on the possibility of produce from Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories being excluded from the EU”. The Minister replied:

“Further to my reply to the Deputy on 25 October, I have made my views known to my EU colleagues, and will continue to do so, when there are suitable opportunities, bilaterally and at EU level. However, as I have stated, it is clear that at this point this suggestion would not command sufficiently wide support.” [\[5\]](#)

So, Ireland is committed to

- (a) the exclusion of settlement produce from the EU, and
- (b) seeking to persuade other member states to this point of view in order to make exclusion a common policy of the EU.

Conclusion

Of course, none of these positive developments in Irish government policy has eased one iota the burden of Israeli oppression against Palestinians. The obstacles to peace identified by the Minister – Israeli military occupation and colonisation – remain in place and the latter grows larger with every day that passes. It is clear that Israel is not going to remove these obstacles voluntarily.

It is impossible for Palestinians to overcome these obstacles to a Palestinian state on their own through negotiations with Israel. They are an occupied people living under Israeli military rule. They are powerless to prevent Israel expanding settlements indefinitely, let alone bring an end to Israeli military rule. Unless the international community weighs in on the side of Palestinians, far from the obstacles to peace being removed, they will continue to grow.

Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are akin to a thief negotiating with his victim about the amount of stolen goods, if any, he is going to give back, while he keeps his boot on the victim’s throat. Without outside help, the Palestinian victim is not going to get any of its stolen goods back.

Unless outside pressure is brought to bear on Israel to halt settlement building and withdraw from the occupied territories, there will never be a Palestinian state.

David Morrison
January 2012

References:

- [\[1\] www.sadaka.ie/Articles/Papers/PAPER-Palestine_in_Irish_Politics.pdf](http://www.sadaka.ie/Articles/Papers/PAPER-Palestine_in_Irish_Politics.pdf)
- [\[2\] debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/07/13/00011.asp](http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/07/13/00011.asp)
- [\[3\] www.dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=87146](http://www.dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=87146)
- [\[4\] debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/10/25/00071.asp](http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/10/25/00071.asp)
- [\[5\] debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/11/02/00033.asp](http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/11/02/00033.asp)

Sadaka supports a peaceful settlement in Israel/Palestine based on the principles of democracy and justice, be that in two states or in one state. We maintain an independent position on internal politics within Palestine, favouring neither Fatah, Hamas nor any other Palestinian political organisation.