

COSATU General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi's address to Lenasia Rally in solidarity with the people of Gaza, 14th January 2009

From our own experience, we know how painful and dehumanising is the system of segregation, otherwise known as apartheid. Apartheid is a system based on the assumption that one group or race is superior to others and therefore has a right to all the privileges and virtues associated with that particular status. It has a right to run and determine the lives of others, excluding them from certain privileges, merely because they do not belong to the "chosen" group.

What other definition would so fittingly define a system based on different rights and privileges for Jews and Arabs in the Middle East? The bantustanisation of Palestine into pieces or strips - West Bank, Ramallah, Gaza strip and so on - run by Israel and with no rights whatsoever for the Palestinians, is definitely an apartheid system.

Israel occupied the land of the Palestinian people and created settler communities of Jews who enjoy a different lifestyle and privileges than those experienced by Palestinians. Palestinians are packed like Sardines in a tin throughout the Bantustans, with Gaza being acknowledged as the world's biggest open-air prison.

The prime characteristics of apartheid in South Africa included:

- Segregation of the country into highly developed whites-only areas co-existing with extremely under-developed black communities, where the majority lived with no or limited rights and access to basic facilities;
- The black majority had no rights to freely participate and determine their destiny without the supervision of the superior race, which made all the decisions and enforced them through a highly militarised state machinery;
- The country was further balkanised into various Bantustans - Bophuthatswana, Kwangwane, Kwandebele, Venda, Transkei, KwaZulu, Ciskei, etc. - which were partitioned in such a way that within the same country you needed a passport to travel from one Bantustan to the other. In between these Bantustans was South Africa, a land foreign to all blacks but firmly in the hands of white supremacists

What is the situation in Palestine today?

- The country is segregated into highly developed settler communities of Jews, on the one hand, and extremely poor and under-developed Arab communities, where the people have no or limited rights and access to basic facilities, with Gaza being the most evident of these.
- The Palestinian people cannot freely determine their own affairs and run their own country, for it is occupied by a colonial power called Israel.
- The country is further balkanised into various Bantustans, amongst them, West Bank, Gaza, and Ramallah, which are connected through extremely restricted travel access over Israel.

It because of these similarities between today's Israel and our past that we call the Israeli state an apartheid state.

Ordinary people in the West Bank, in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and in the Gaza Strip, have suffered enough under Israeli occupation. The settlements, the separation wall, the hundreds of checkpoints and the detention of over 11,000 Palestinian people in Israeli jails are just some of unbearable conditions that prevail in Gaza.

It is our firm belief that, like all other suffering, colonised, oppressed and subjugated peoples all over the world, Palestinians are not naturally a violent people. They are not provocative, but they have the right to resist when provoked and subjected to the most cruel and barbaric forms of occupation and invasion. They need to restore their pride and dignity, and regain their disposed lands. We support these claims unconditionally. We too suffered in defence of exactly the claims in the hands of ruthless sister forces to the Zionists who occupy Palestine. Resistance must never be equated to provocation.

In the same way that the ANC-led liberation movement here in South Africa refused to submit to the most extreme form of invasion and subjugation, but fought with all means at our disposal, why should the Palestinian people be denied that right? In fact, a colonised people who do not fight for their freedom are not worth the honourable status of belonging to the family of human beings. This is why the Palestinian people are correct to fight for their freedom. However, in fighting for their freedom, they are called all sorts of names, just as we were also called all sorts of names, and the best known one is "terrorists".

Which freedom fighter has never had that label, when even our own heroic son of the soil, Dr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela has only just recently been removed from the list of terrorists in the US? It seems to have become an honour for anyone fighting for freedom to be called a terrorist. Just next door to us in Swaziland, PUDEMO President, Mario Masuku is in jail on charges of terrorism, merely for fighting for the rights of his people.

However, that should not divert the issue and all sorts of distortions about the reality and facts in the Middle East. The aggressor is the coloniser, in this case Israel, who forcefully invaded the land of other people and took away their land, what other option, was left for those disposed people (Palestinians) than to resist and fight for their land, and that is what exactly the people of Palestine are doing.

The hypocritical equal apportionment of condemnation to both the aggressor and victim is dishonest and not fair. There is no neutrality in a struggle; the occupying and oppressive force is immoral and the resisting force has the moral responsibility to fight for freedom. This however does not mean there are no limits and responsibilities for those fighting freedom to observe, of course.

We have noted this chorus of the equal condemnation of the aggressor and the victim. Even those who are supposed to be progressive have been blackmailed to toe this line of equal condemnation. Israel uses brute force and violence to enforce its illegal occupation of Palestine.

The Palestinian people have been left with no option but to resist the occupation of their land and the dehumanisation and denial of their rights. Does this mean both are equally liable for the breaking of the truce that was also not guaranteeing them their

freedom, but maintaining them in conditions of injustice and occupation? The truce is important, but does it change the fact that the struggle for freedom continues and that injustice still prevails in Palestine?

Just by simply closing the Gaza Strip, frustrating the movement of people and goods, limiting the flow of gas and electricity, destroying the sewage system, Israel has turned the Strip into a zone of permanent hell. Regular outbursts of direct military violence and response by Palestinians that have recurred at least once a year since 2002 ("Operation Defence Shield") multiply victims but do not change the basic fact of Israeli occupation and brutality.

And the assault will seek to annihilate that population. And whichever man, woman, child, or elderly person that manages to escape or hide from the predictably bloody assault will later be "hunted" so that the cleansing is complete and the commanders in charge of the operation can report to their superiors: "We've completed the mission."

And then, from up there above, they will write about the Palestinians' violent nature and they'll make declarations condemning that violence and they'll get back to discussing if it's Zionism or anti-Semitism.

While many people may believe that the current violence in Gaza began on December 27, in fact Palestinians have been dying from bombardments for many weeks. On November 4, when the Israeli-Palestinian truce was still in effect but global attention was turned to the US elections, Israel launched a "pre-emptive" air strike on Gaza, alleging intelligence about an imminent operation to capture Israeli soldiers. More assaults took place throughout the month.

It is estimated that 400,000 people, most of them in Gaza city, do not have access to piped water. It is reported that sewage is flooding into the streets as the result of the damage to the sewage network. Gaza city wastewater treatment plant was hit

While the Israeli cheerleaders testified to the superior moral fibre of their team, the Palestinian civilian death toll mounted. Reports confirm that Israeli missiles tore at least fifteen Palestinian police cadets to shreds at a graduation ceremony, blew twelve worshipers to pieces (including six children) while they left evening prayers at a mosque, flattened the elite American International School, killed five sisters while they slept in their beds, and liquidated nine women and children in order to kill a single Hamas leader.

So far, Israeli forces have killed at least 900 people from Gaza and wounded some several thousands, including hundreds of children. Yesterday, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) blanketed parts of Gaza with white phosphorus, a chemical weapon Saddam Hussein once deployed against Kurdish rebels.

A new word emerged from the carnage in Gaza this week: "scholasticide" - the systematic destruction by Israeli forces of centres of education dear to Palestinian society, as the Ministry of Education was bombed, the infrastructure of teaching

destroyed, and schools across the Gaza strip targeted for attack by the air, sea and ground offensives.

We are deeply troubled by the immoral position adopted by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Zionist Federation and the Chief Rabbi, Warren Goldstein, on the current atrocities in Gaza. They continue to justify the aggression in all sorts of jargons, masking the true character of the human crisis and suffering inflicted daily on the people of Palestine.

We also note that mainstream media continues to stigmatise the legitimate struggles of the resisting people, preferring to call it in all sorts of words - terrorism, attack, etc.

We salute and welcome the ever growing movement of Jews and Israelis who are beginning to speak out boldly against the genocide carried out in the name of the Israeli people by a few warmongers and their US allies in the conservative elite ruling the US.

The International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) is one of those organisations or network of Jews whose Jewish identities are not based on Zionism but on a plurality of histories and experiences. According to their own declaration, they share a commitment to participation in the legacy of struggles against colonisation and imperialism. As such, they struggle against Zionism and its manifestation in the State of Israel's historic and ongoing ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people and the confiscation of their land.

US complicity in the genocide

Israel is the biggest recipient of US aid, roughly estimated at around \$32 billion^[1] per annum. No doubt, the bulk of this amount is used for military purposes and protecting Israel's imperial posture in the Middle East in pursuit of its position as the US client state in that part of the world responsible for defending its strategic and economic interests. Military and strategic co-operation between the two states run deeper than imagined.

According to recent reports the Pentagon plans to make a large arms delivery to Israel, raising fears that the military campaign in Gaza will go on for a long time.

The US is trying to hire a merchant ship that can carry hundreds of tons of weapons from Greece to Israel later this month, Reuters reported, citing tender documents it had obtained.

According to the US Navy's Military Sealift Command (MSC), the ship will transport 325 standard 20-foot containers of what has been called 'ammunition' from the Greek port of Astakos to the Israeli port of Ashdod on two separate trips in the second half of January.

A description on the manifest says the containers will be loaded with 'hazardous material', such as explosive substances and detonators, without giving any more

^[1] Al Jazeera

details.

The Pentagon announced the tender for the ship in the last hours of 2008. The two deadlines set for the deliveries are January 25 and the last day of the month.

Meanwhile, a Pentagon spokesman confirmed the planned arms shipment to Israel, but denied that the delivery was linked to the Israel's deadly offensive in Gaza.

In September, the US Congress approved a plan to sell Israel 1,000 bunker-buster bombs, of the Guided Bomb Unit-39 (GBU-39), that use GPS to find their way and are able to penetrate deep fortified constructions, such as Iran's nuclear facilities.

Last week, *The Jerusalem Post*, reported that the first shipment of the missiles arrived in early December, adding that the bombs had been used in the military onslaught in Gaza.

Palestine is bleeding, lamenting is a luxury and action is long overdue!

We support and encourage the Boycott, Disinvestment, and Sanction (BDS) efforts against Israel around the world.

We ask the newly elected US President, Barack Obama to indeed live true to his promise for real change, of which US foreign policy should be one of the key focus areas. In this regard, we call on him to stop U.S aid to Israel. This becomes not only necessary but also a duty of international solidarity, which should be the priority action point among labour unions around the world.

We also call upon all and everyone to be an active player in raising funds and all the material resources to meet the bare necessities of food, medicine, and medical supplies for the people.

The utter disregard for international law by Israel and its contempt for UN resolutions further confirm the need for the restructuring and transformation of this super global governance institution to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Its relevance as a custodian of global peace and security is in question. So is its legitimacy to resolve disputes and set standards for global governance.

However, we welcome the decision of the UN Human Rights Council despite US attempts to frustrate its efforts towards condemning Israel.

We are putting forward the following issues for a way forward:

1. All trade unions, social movements, NGOs, religious organisations and academics to support and actively participate in the BDS campaign against Israel, refusing to handle anything that comes from and that goes to Israel in order to isolate it until it submits to international law and withdraws from all the occupied territories
2. We urge all companies and all shipping companies to refuse to carry any shipment of arms to Israel. Any shipping company who carries these weapons has the blood of the people of Gaza on its hands!

3. We call upon all governments to enforce international law, by refusing to recognise a country that makes a mockery of international law and the pursuit of human dignity. In this regard, they must expel Israeli ambassadors and representatives in order to ensure that we isolate it throughout the world until it subscribes to the ideals of human dignity! In this case, we salute the bold example of Venezuela and call upon all countries to emulate it.
4. We call upon international media to expose the real truth behind the war and not to hide the real issues in the name of objectivity, by projecting an image of Israel as a state under siege by terrorist, thus discrediting the legitimate resistance of the Palestinian people. Balanced reporting does not mean, massaging issues and diluting the truth even in the face of insurmountable evidence against the wrong side.
5. We call upon the international trade union movement to emulate the heroic example of the Norwegian Locomotive Drivers Union, which on Thursday 8th January ensured that all trains in the whole of Norway, and all trams and subways in Oslo, stood still for two minutes in protest against Israeli invasion. In the process, they issued the following information for passengers:
“Because of the situation in the Gaza Strip, the Locomotive Drivers Union in Norway has decided to demonstrate our solidarity with the Palestinian people. This will be organised by adding two more minutes of stoppage at the station. The same action applies to all passenger trains in Norway simultaneously. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the Palestinian territory. Thank you for your understanding”. This is very inspiring coming from Europe where the tendency even amongst progressives is to be apologetic about Israel and condemn the Palestinian struggle as acts of terrorism
6. We call for particular focus on targeting the conservative US and British foreign policies, which requires that we work with our counterpart unions and progressive organisations in these countries to effect radical foreign policy changes in relation to the Middle East. This should include exposing the complicit role of these two states in perpetuating the violence and arming Israel, while rhetorically positioning themselves as anti-terrorists.
7. We acknowledge the progressive role of our government in relation to the situation in the Middle East, including its humanitarian support for the suffering people of Gaza, but believe that there is a lot more we can do working together. In this instance, we call for the cessation of all trade relations with Israel.
8. The Arab League must be brought under pressure to act in solidarity with the Palestinian people and limit the chances of some states openly collaborating with Israel, but to lead the global offensive for the isolation of Israel, owing to their strategic proximity in that area.

Once again, the global solidarity movement must be intensified to support the cause of the suffering people of Palestine, even more so with the crisis in Gaza. A day more under occupation is hell for the dispossessed people.

1-5 Leyds Cnr Biccard Streets
Braamfontein, 2017

P.O. Box 1019
Johannesburg, 2000
SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: +27 11 339-4911/24
Fax: +27 11 339-5080/6940/ 086 603 9667
Cell: 0828217456
E-Mail: patrick@cosatu.org.za