

Inevitable Solutions to the Palestinian Plight Universiti Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD) 28 November 2023

May I begin by thanking Professor Datuk Azizian Baharuddin, the director of UMCCD, for the kind invitation to give this lecture. I also wish to thank Norma Hashim and Professor Dr Mohd Nazari Ismail of the Hashim Sani Centre for Palestine Studies for co-hosting this lecture and also for sponsoring my visit.

Over thirty years ago I gave an annual lecture to 16–17-year-old students at Guildford Grammar School, on virtually the same subject as we are considering today. I began by warning the students that there would be homework to motivate them to pay attention. And I say the same to you today – there will be homework.

The title I have been given is “*Inevitable Solutions to the Palestinian Plight*”. Note the first two words – ‘Inevitable’ and “Solutions” because there are many solutions to the Palestinian plight. I will major on three today. These three are in fact mutually exclusive. How then can they be inevitable? That in part depends on you, me and seven billion other people in the world. Let me illustrate. Climate change is inevitable, it is happening, but the solutions (and there are several) depend on us and how seriously we

adjust our values, our priorities and life styles. So it is with resolving the Palestinian plight.

I often encounter people who insist the issue is too intractable or complicated to resolve. They accept the Zionist narrative that this is a centuries old struggle between Jews and Muslims and that a lasting peace is impossible. Even worse, they insist this is predicted in the Hebrew & Christian scriptures. I totally reject that view and have spent the last 30 years advocating for justice, peace and reconciliation. Although not directly related my PhD and much of my research has analysed and refuted Christian Zionism. If this is of interest, you can read numerous articles and access my books on the subject from my website www.stephensizer.com .

When I am trying to help people engage with the Palestinian plight, whether children or adults, I use a simple memorable analogy. Do you remember visiting your grandparents? One of the essential roles of a grandparent is to spoil their grandchildren. My grandparents had a glass cookie jar. My grandmother would say, "Have a cookie darling". But being greedy I would grab hold of as many cookies as I could. The problem was getting my hand out of the jar. I had to let go of some of the cookies in order to enjoy a one or two.

Israel is just like that. Israel has its hand in the cookie jar – the Western colonial powers cookie jar that inspired, facilitated, funded and continue to shield Israel from criticism today. But it is greedy. It wants three cookies and thinks that if it holds on to them long enough it can keep them, but it can't because its hand is stuck in the colonial jar. It can only have two. It must let go of one of the three if it wants to enjoy the other two. As long as it refuses to let go, peace and security remain an illusion, and the Palestinian plight grows worse, as we see in Gaza today.

What are the three cookies? Israel wants to be a Democracy, a Jewish State and colonise all the Land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, the more extreme Zionist vision is for all the land from the Nile in Egypt to the Euphrates in Iraq.

Giving up one of the three will help resolve the Palestinian plight. What are they?

Two States: Israel and Palestine

The acquisition of territory by war is inadmissible in international law. Therefore, the seizure, occupation and colonisation of the West Bank from Jordan and Gaza from Egypt in 1967, together with the annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan from Syria is illegal in international law.

After 55 years, it is clearly not a temporary occupation. Since 1967 Israel has expanded its settlements or colonies throughout Palestine, making life unbearable for the Palestinians.

The Two State solution, based on the 1967 borders is the favoured solution within the United Nations. Israel can remain a democracy and a Jewish state if it withdraws to the 1967 borders and allows a sovereign, contiguous, independent Palestinian State.

The sticking point is that Israel's increasingly extremist government rejects the Two State solution and has no intention of withdrawing the illegal Jewish settlements. In the light of the onslaught in Gaza, there is renewed enthusiasm by the United States for the Two State solution.

However, it is feared that post-Gaza what will be proposed by Biden and the US administration is the recognition of the status quo – the facts on the ground, a Palestinian state based on “Palestans” (a term derived from the South African “Bantustans”). The Palestans are the isolated ghettos of Nablus, Jenin, Tulkharm, Ramallah, East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron and Gaza. These Palestinian cities are isolated and separated by exclusive Jewish colonies, the separation wall and settler roads.¹

¹ See Jeff Halper, *Gaza, the Day After: The Battle Against Two-State Apartheid*
<https://icahd.org/2023/11/09/gaza-the-day-after-the-battle-against-two-state-apartheid/>

Any future Palestinian state would therefore be neither sovereign, independent or contiguous. It would also be demilitarised with no international borders. This is totally unacceptable. As Jeff Halper insists:

“If Biden’s attempt is to be more than a cosmetic manoeuvre to present a chain of Israeli-controlled bantustans as a Palestinian “state,” it must embrace the following conditions:

- *A Palestinian state must have control over its internationally- recognized borders, a fundamental criterion of sovereignty and vital to its economic viability;*
- *It must be territorially contiguous. In order to make the West Bank a coherent state territory, most or all of Israel’s settlements will have to be removed since their very location was strategically planned so as to guarantee permanent Israeli control. And an extraterritorial passage for people and goods would have to established between the West Bank and Gaza.*
- *Within its national territory it must exercise sovereign control over all its resources, from natural resources such as water, land and minerals to sacred sites and tourist attractions.*
- *In that vein it must include East Jerusalem, the most significant symbol of Palestinian national and religious life and a major part of its economy, tourism being Palestine’s largest industry. (At the*

least an arrangement for shared sovereignty over the Old City may be negotiated.)

- As opposed to Israel's demand that the Palestinian state be demilitarized, it must have the ability to defend its sovereignty and territory. At the least a Palestinian armed force is required that has policing capabilities within the state's borders and sovereignty of action on them, backed up by international guarantees of the state's sovereignty.*
- And, of course, the non-negotiable right of the refugees and their descendants to return or receive compensation if they choose to remain in Jordan and other countries where they have created new lives; or resettlement elsewhere.²*

What are the prospects of Israel withdrawing unilaterally to the 1967 borders and removing all its settlements?

Zero. Israel has no incentive whatsoever as long as the US continues to fund Israel nearly \$4 billion a year, provide the latest military hardware and blocks all censure in the UN. So what is the alternative?

One Democratic State

One democratic state for all citizens from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees and their families expelled in 1948 and 1967. While this alternative is only favoured by a

² Ibid.,

small minority of Palestinians at present, interest is growing.

In this regard I commend to you the One Democratic State Campaign³, founded by Awad Abdelfattah and Jeff Halper.

“Liberation requires more than resistance, protest and activism. It requires a political plan that replaces political structures of oppression with a new polity and society based on justice, egalitarianism and inclusiveness, but also on respect for the country’s diverse national, ethnic, religious and communal identities. Since Israel has eliminated the two-state solution in its relentless campaign to colonize all of Palestine, the idea of a single democratic state as the best political solution for the peoples inhabiting historic Palestine has gained increasing support in recent years. It is not a new idea. The Palestinian liberation movement, before the Nakba of 1948 and after, had promoted this vision. And the goal of establishing a single, secular, democratic state was enshrined in the PLO’s National Charter.”⁴

To become a reality, however, this will require Israel to give up being a Jewish State and repeal its controversial “nation-state” law. Passed in 2018,

“The [Nation-State] law does three big things:

³ <https://onestatecampaign.org/en/>

⁴ <https://onestatecampaign.org/en/archives/call-for-international-support-from-the-one-democratic-state-campaign-odsc/>

- 1. It states that “the right to exercise national self-determination” in Israel is “unique to the Jewish people.”*
- 2. It establishes Hebrew as Israel’s official language, and downgrades Arabic — a language widely spoken by Arab Israelis — to a “special status.”*
- 3. It establishes “Jewish settlement as a national value” and mandates that the state “will labour to encourage and promote its establishment and development.”⁵*

With Israeli society moving further and further to the right, is it conceivable that Israel will repeal its “Nation-State” law, give up being a Jewish State and recognise all Palestinians as citizens with equal rights? No, not at present. It has no incentive to do so.

So what is the third option? Recognise that,

Israel is an Apartheid State

If Israel will not withdraw from the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, or share citizenship with Palestinians in One Democratic State, what is the alternative? The alternative is for the international community to recognise Israel is a settler colonial Apartheid State, perpetrating genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

⁵ <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/7/31/17623978/israel-jewish-nation-state-law-bill-explained-apartheid-netanyahu-democracy>

The word “Apartheid” is a South African word derived from the root ‘*apart*’ meaning ‘separate’ and ‘*heid*’ meaning ‘hood’ and translated as “aparthood”. It describes a system of institutionalised racial segregation that existed in South Africa and South West Africa (now Namibia) from 1948 until the early 1990s.

“Apartheid is a violation of public international law, a grave violation of internationally protected human rights, and a crime against humanity under international criminal law.

The term “apartheid” was originally used to refer to a political system in South Africa which explicitly enforced racial segregation, and the domination and oppression of one racial group by another. It has since been adopted by the international community to condemn and criminalize such systems and practices wherever they occur in the world.

“The crime against humanity of apartheid under the Apartheid Convention, the Rome Statute and customary international law is committed when any inhuman or inhumane act (essentially a serious human rights violation) is perpetrated in the context of an institutionalised regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over another, with the intention to maintain that system.”⁶

The 1998 Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court and 1973 UN International Convention on the

⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>

Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid define apartheid as a crime against humanity consisting of three elements:

- 1. An intent to maintain domination by one racial group over another.*
- 2. A context of systematic oppression by one racial group over another.*
- 3. Inhumane acts.⁷*

Although later revoked under pressure from the United States and Israel, in 1975, the UN specifically applied this definition to Israel, describing the ethnic exclusivism intrinsic to Zionism as, '*a form of racism and racial discrimination.*'⁸

The Afrikaans word "Apartheid" is translated "Hafrada" in Hebrew. Ironically, the Israeli government uses the same word to describe the Separation Wall which weaves its way through the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the route of which is purposely designed to maximise the amount of land to be annexed while minimising the number of Palestinians still living on it.

⁷Visualising Palestine "The Crime of Apartheid" www.visualizingpalestine.org

⁸Resolution of the UN General Assembly on the report of the Third Committee (A/10320) 3379 (XXX). Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf>

Israeli apartheid is implemented in numerous ways described by Jeff Halper, the Israeli anthropologist, as a “Matrix of Control”⁹

In 2021, two major reports were published by Human Rights Watch¹⁰ and B’Tselem, the Israeli human rights NGO.¹¹ Both defined Israel as an apartheid state.

B’Tselem’s report “*This is Apartheid*” is subtitled, “*A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*” and explains how Israel divides, separates and rules over the lives of Palestinians.

“In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices and state violence designed to cement the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians. A key method in pursuing this goal is engineering space differently for each group.

Jewish citizens live as though the entire area were a single space (excluding the Gaza Strip). The Green Line means next to nothing for them: whether they live west of it, within Israel’s sovereign territory, or east of it, in settlements not formally annexed to Israel, is irrelevant to their rights or status.

⁹ Jeff Halper, *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine: Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and the Case for One Democratic State* (London, Pluto, 2021)

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, “A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution, (27 April 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

¹¹ B’Tselem, “This is Apartheid” (12 January 2021) https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid

Where Palestinians live, on the other hand, is crucial. The Israeli regime has divided the area into several units that it defines and governs differently, according to Palestinians different rights in each. This division is relevant to Palestinians only. The geographic space, which is contiguous for Jews, is a fragmented mosaic for Palestinians.”¹²

The B’Tselem report concludes,

“Fighting for a future based on human rights, liberty and justice is especially crucial now. There are various political paths to a just future here, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, but all of us must first choose to say no to apartheid.”¹³

In February 2022, Amnesty International also published a report, “*Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians*”¹⁴ adding their voice to that of B’Tselem and Human Rights Watch.

“Amnesty International’s new investigation shows that Israel imposes a system of oppression and domination against Palestinians across all areas under its control: in Israel and the OPT, and against Palestinian refugees, in order to benefit Jewish Israelis. This amounts to apartheid as prohibited in international law.

Laws, policies and practices which are intended to maintain a cruel system of control over Palestinians, have left them fragmented geographically and

¹² Ibid.,

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>

politically, frequently impoverished, and in a constant state of fear and insecurity.¹⁵

Amnesty insists:

“Apartheid is not acceptable anywhere in the world. So why has the world accepted it against Palestinians?”

Human rights have long been side-lined by the international community when dealing with the decades-long struggle and suffering of Palestinians. Palestinians facing the brutality of Israel’s repression have been calling for an understanding of Israel’s rule as apartheid for over two decades. Over time, a broader international recognition of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians as apartheid has begun to take shape.

Yet, governments with the responsibility and power to do something have refused to take any meaningful action to hold Israel accountable. Instead, they have been hiding behind a moribund peace process at the expense of human rights and accountability.

Unfortunately, the situation today is one of no progress towards a just solution and worsening human rights for Palestinians. Amnesty is calling for Israel to end the international wrong, and crime, of apartheid, by dismantling measures of fragmentation, segregation, discrimination, and deprivation, currently in place against the Palestinian population.”¹⁶

And this is where your homework comes in.

¹⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶ Ibid.,

If as Amnesty assert, *“governments with the responsibility and power to do something have refused to take any meaningful action to hold Israel accountable”*, we must take responsibility for them.

Which brings us to your homework I mentioned at the beginning. Your homework therefore is really very simple. Assuming you are under 30, your parents and grandparents generation (and I include myself) have failed Palestinians for 75 years. The crisis in Gaza did not begin on October 7th. It began with a series of events such as the infamous Balfour Declaration on 1917, the subsequent terrorist attacks on Palestinians by Jewish extremists and the Nakba which began in 1948, picked up momentum in the aftermath of the war in 1967, and has accelerated since with total impunity.

We each need to take responsibility to become the ‘inevitable solution to the Palestinian plight’. How? By exposing the reality of Israeli apartheid and by helping to persuade Israelis that it must choose one of the other two alternatives if they wish to be considered a democracy and enjoy peace and security with their neighbours.

Israelis must choose either to be one democratic state or two and allow an independent Palestinian State on the pre

1967 borders recognised by the international community.
How can we be part of the inevitable solution?

Let me close by giving you three ways you can make a difference. Three ways you can help assist an 'inevitable solution' to the Palestinian plight which is non-violent, and just to both Israelis and Palestinians, to Muslims, Jews and Christians in Israel-Palestine.

1. Join the BDS Movement

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality. BDS upholds the simple principle that Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity.

Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, the BDS call urges action to pressure Israel to comply with international law.

Boycotts involve withdrawing support from Israel's apartheid regime, complicit Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions, and from all Israeli and international companies engaged in violations of Palestinian human rights.

Divestment campaigns urge banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw

investments from the State of Israel and all Israeli and international companies that sustain Israeli apartheid.

Sanction campaigns pressure governments to fulfil their legal obligations to end Israeli apartheid, and not aid or assist its maintenance, by banning business with illegal Israeli settlements, ending military trade and free-trade agreements, as well as suspending Israel's membership in international forums such as UN bodies and FIFA.

BDS is now a vibrant global movement made up of unions, academic associations, churches and grassroots movements across the world. Since its launch in 2005, BDS is having a major impact and is effectively challenging international support for Israeli apartheid and settler-colonialism.¹⁷

In the UK, we have been engaging in BDS for a number of years and have seen success in campaigns against Ahava¹⁸, Veolia¹⁹, Caterpillar²⁰ and G4S²¹.

“Non-violence is a powerful and just weapon. It is a weapon unique in history, which cuts without wounding. It is a sword that heals.” Martin Luther King

¹⁷ <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>

¹⁸ <https://bdsmovement.net/tags/ahava>

¹⁹ <https://bdsmovement.net/tags/veolia>

²⁰ <https://bdsmovement.net/tags/caterpillar>

²¹ <https://bdsmovement.net/stop-g4s>

Join the BDS movement.

2. Join the ODS Campaign

“The One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC), founded in 2018 by Palestinians and their anti-colonial Israeli Jewish comrades, has forged a detailed 10-point program for the founding of just such a state. It begins by asserting that only through a thorough process of decolonization can the Zionist colonial structures of domination and control be dismantled. That prepares the way for a single constitutional democracy based on the principle of equal citizenship – one person, one vote – that will ensure individual civil liberties.”²²

ODSC has published a Manifesto which details what a One Democratic State in Israel and Palestine will look like. It contains ten essential aspects. The first three are fundamental:

- 1. A Single Constitutional Democracy.** *One Democratic State shall be established between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as a state belonging to all its citizens, including the Palestinian refugees. All citizens will enjoy equal rights, freedom and security. The State shall be a constitutional democracy, the authority to govern and make laws emanating from the will of the people. All its citizens shall enjoy equal rights to vote, nominate candidates for any post and take part in the country’s governance.*

²² <https://onestatecampaign.org/en/archives/call-for-international-support-from-the-one-democratic-state-campaign-odsc/>

- 2. Right of Return, of Restoration and of Reintegration into Society.** *The single democratic state will fully implement the Right of Return of all Palestinian refugees and their descendants, those who were expelled in 1948 and thereafter, whether living in exile abroad or currently living in historic Palestine, including those with Israeli citizenship. The State will aid them in returning to their country and to the places from which they were expelled. It will help them rebuild their personal lives and to be fully reintegrated into the country's society, economy and polity. The State will do everything in its power to restore to the refugees their private and communal property and/or compensate them.*
- 3. Individual Rights.** *No State law, institution or practices shall discriminate among its citizens on the basis of ethnic identity, national or cultural belonging, or on the basis of color, gender, language, religion, political opinion, property or sexual orientation. The state will grant all its citizens the right to freedom of movement and the right to reside anywhere in the country. The state will guarantee to all the citizens equal rights in all levels and institutions and will guarantee free thought and freedom of opinion. Alongside religious marriage the State will provide civil marriage.²³*

I invite you to read and endorse the full ODSC Manifesto and join the campaign.²⁴ Finally,

²³ <https://onestatecampaign.org/all/en-manifesto/>

²⁴ [Ibid.](#)

Join the Convivencia Alliance

The Convivencia Alliance²⁵ is a coalition of Jewish, Muslim and Christian organisations supporting a just peace in Palestine based on One Democratic State, launched in London in May 2022. The founding organisations were Jewish Network for Palestine, (JNP), the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) and Peacemaker Trust.

Convivencia simply means ‘coexistence’. It is an academic hypothesis, first proposed by the Spanish philologist Américo Castro, regarding the coexistence of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities during the period of Spanish history from the Muslim Umayyad conquest of Hispania in the early eighth century until the expulsion of the Jews by Christian rulers in 1492.

The Convivencia Alliance has grown significantly since the launch and the Convivencia Declaration²⁶, outlining the aims and objectives of the Alliance, has already been endorsed by an extensive and growing list of internationally known leaders and organisations²⁷. Among the aims of the Convivencia Alliance, we are committed to being:

A Proactive Coalition: We commit ourselves to the principle of a decolonising Convivencia to counter the

²⁵ <https://www.convivencia.uk>

²⁶ <https://www.convivencia.uk/the-declaration/>

²⁷ <https://www.convivencia.uk/the-alliance/>

poison of racial hatred and colonial exploitation. This requires a new collaboration between secular and religious groups, to build a just coexistence and a common struggle against Israeli Apartheid.

A Cross-faith Platform: We desire to be a platform for a cross-faith organisational collaboration around Convivencia (or a just coexistence) based on demands for social justice. This is the foundation of a shared political community in Palestine.

Advance collective action: We commit to stimulate greater responsibility and inspiration for such collective action, beyond simply agreement with these aims. We will need to better understand the diverse bases of collective action (such as social justice or human rights) and how they can converge more effectively.

Three constructive ways you can be part of the solution to the Palestinian plight.

My personal dream has always been of seeing Jews, Muslims and Christians work together to bring justice, peace and reconciliation in Palestine. Because, if with God's help we can achieve peace in Palestine, we can achieve it anywhere. That is why I am delighted to have given this presentation in the Universiti Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue.

Conclusions

To return to my opening illustration, Israel has its hand stuck in the cookie jar. It wants three cookies, to be a democracy, to be a Jewish state and to keep all the Land designated as a Palestinian State. It can have two but not three. It can withdraw to the 1967 borders and allow a Palestinian State – the two-state solution. Or it can cease being a Jewish state and share equal rights with Palestinians in One Democratic State. But if it can't, or rather won't choose, we must force them and the international community to face the reality that Israel is a racist settler colonial apartheid state which can no longer be tolerated.

I have shared three solutions to the Palestinian plight. Two are constructive, one is destructive. Israel will continue to solidify its apartheid regime and exacerbate the plight of Palestinians unless and until we embrace one or either of the alternative solutions. That is why I encourage you to join the BDS movement, the ODSC campaign and the Convivencia Alliance.

“The end of apartheid stands as one of the crowning accomplishments of the past century, but we would not have succeeded without the help of international pressure... If apartheid ended, so can this occupation, but the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu