

Israeli human rights organization declares Israel an apartheid state

Jean Shaoul**17 January 2021**

B'Tselem, one of Israel's foremost human rights organisations, has issued a report stating that Israel is not a democracy but an "apartheid regime" that enforces Jewish supremacy over the Palestinians in all the land it controls.

It confirms not only what critics of Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians have long been saying, but also the historic bankruptcy and reactionary culmination of the Zionist project and all such nationalist programs.

In the 1967 War, Israel seized the West Bank and East Jerusalem, previously under Jordanian rule, and Gaza, previously administered by Egypt and under blockade by Israel since 2007. Collectively they are home to more than five million Palestinians.

Within Israel, there are approximately 2 million citizens of Palestinian origin, one fifth of the total population, meaning that Palestinians form around half of the population in the lands controlled by Israel. These four Palestinian groups have different rights from each other that are all inferior to those of Jewish Israelis living in the same areas (except for Gaza where there are no Israeli settlements).

As B'Tselem points out, "the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is organized under a single principle: advancing and cementing the supremacy of one group—Jews—over another—Palestinians."

B'Tselem's report, "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid," argues, "By geographically, demographically and physically engineering space, the regime enables Jews to live in a contiguous area with full rights, including self-determination, while Palestinians live in separate units and enjoy fewer rights. This qualifies as an apartheid regime, although Israel is commonly viewed as a democracy upholding a temporary occupation."

Apartheid is deemed a crime under international law. In

1973, the United Nations General Assembly called for the ratification of The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, which the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defined as inhumane acts "committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime." Neither Israel nor its chief backer the US signed up to the Rome Statute.

Hagai El-Ad, B'Tselem's executive director, said, "Israel is not a democracy that has a temporary occupation attached to it. "It is one regime between the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, and we must look at the full picture and see it for what it is: apartheid."

B'Tselem is not alone in its view. Israeli human rights groups, leftist groups, the so-called "peace camp", the Meretz Party and politicians, including President Reuven Rivlin and former prime ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, have for some time been warning that while there was "not yet apartheid" in Israel, it was on a slippery slope. More than a few politicians argued that without a "two-state solution," Israel would become an apartheid state.

Last summer, Yesh Din (There is a Law), another Israeli human rights group, published a legal opinion arguing that Israel operated apartheid in the West Bank.

B'Tselem goes much further and includes Israel itself within the apartheid regime, pointing to two recent developments. The first, Israel's openly racist Nation State Law enshrines the principle of Jewish supremacy as the legal foundation of the state. It includes Jews not just in Israel but throughout the diaspora who have automatic right to immigration and citizenship, although Israel denies the "right of return" to Palestinians who fled or were driven out of their homes in the 1948-49 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. Furthermore, it proclaims Jerusalem

“complete and united” as Israel’s capital.

The Nation State Law actively promotes the Judaicisation of the occupied territories and the expansion of the settlements, stipulating that “the State considers the development of Jewish settlements a national value and will take action to encourage and promote the establishment and reinforcement of such settlements.”

It sanctions the exclusion of Arabs from exclusively Jewish communities, demotes Arabic from its position as an official state language and gives official and exclusive standing to Jewish symbols, including declaring “Hatikva” the national anthem. It prevents Palestinians from getting Israeli citizenship by marrying Israelis and future asylum seekers from entering Israel. The law thus provides the framework for an apartheid state that ends any commitment to equality and openly aligns the state with the brutal oppression of an entire people, the Palestinians.

While there was widespread opposition to the Nation State Law among Jews within Israel and without, it could find no expression in the Knesset due to the cowardice and complicity of the opposition Labour Party.

Secondly, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing coalition government has repeatedly declared its plans for the annexation of parts of the West Bank. While these plans have been put on hold in the wake of the “normalization” of relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, there is no mistaking the government’s intentions that have the support of the ultra-nationalist and religious parties. Thus, Israel intends to extend its rule over the Palestinians and make a Palestinian state completely impossible.

Israel already controls many aspects of life, including the population registry, land allocation, voter rolls, and the right or denial to travel within, or enter or exit any part of the area.

Implicit in B’Tselem’s acknowledgement that Israel is an apartheid state is that the two-state solution is dead, following Trump’s farcical “peace plan”, announced in January last year, that supported Netanyahu’s plans to annex parts of the West Bank where nearly 500,000 Israeli settlers live. The Abraham Accords, to which several Arab states—with the nod from Saudi Arabia—have signed up, is the official death certificate for the Arab Initiative. The Arab Initiative was launched by Riyadh in 2002 and endorsed by the Arab League, and made normalization of relations with Israel conditional upon a full withdrawal from the occupied territories, a “just settlement” of the Palestinian refugee problem based on

UN Resolution 194, and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

That an Israeli organization has called Israel an apartheid state and a “regime of Jewish supremacy” exposes the fraudulent claim of the Israel lobby in Europe and the US, based upon the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, that equates criticism of Israeli government policy, including its racist policies towards the Palestinians, with anti-Semitism.

The open turn to apartheid policies is the product of two major factors. First, the acute political and economic crisis of the Zionist state, one of the most unequal in the developed world. Second, the logic of the Zionist project that sought the establishment of a Jewish state as a safe haven for a people who had been cruelly persecuted. Such a state could only be achieved through the violent dispossession of the indigenous Arab population, with the horrors of the Holocaust used to justify the oppression of another people.

The new upsurge of the international working class against social inequality, repression and social injustice points the way forward for the masses of Jewish and Arab workers alike in the form of a united struggle to overthrow and replace the Zionist state and the various Arab bourgeois regimes and forge the United Socialist States of the Middle East.

This is the perspective fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). It is vital that sections of the ICFI are built in Israel and across the Middle East to provide the leadership necessary to conduct this struggle.



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