

MEWANDO

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The Bilbao Initiative: Networks and alliances in solidarity with Palestine

Between the 29th and 31st of October, 2008, more than 50 civil society organizations will meet in Bilbao to study a new strategy to support the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation. If you would like to participate, contact the MEWANDO network.

JOSU PERALES (MIEMBRO DE MUNDUBAT)

EThe roar of violence silences the voices of Palestinian and Israeli society, whilst inefficient official diplomacy disregards social movements, denying them space to put forth their proposals. Oslo, the failed Road Map, Annapolis: in none of them was civil society consulted on crucial decisions. Nonetheless, the people of Palestine and Israel and their social organizations have the capacity to propose democratic alternatives which go deep into the root causes of their problems. They have the capacity to overcome the meanders of in-operative political processes which continue to favor Zionism and its colonization and oppression of the Palestinian people. In fact, in the past few years, networks and social alliances between Palestinians and Israelis against the occupation have multiplied and are consolidating into a genuine social fabric which aspires to be listened to, and which demands the application of International law and defends the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians. It is a unique situation that Israeli and Palestinian citizens have come together at social forums, as a response to the necessity of speaking together loud enough to be heard.

2. These social forums have not engaged

in the production of elusive rhetoric; on the contrary, the participants have spoken with a clear and unanimous voice against occupation and colonization, and in defense of all Palestinian rights including the right of return for refugees. They have embodied courageous political acts against the wall that Israel continues to build with the intention of ostracizing Palestinian people, but also against a wall of a different nature: the mental wall which consistently invites alienation and isolation. Palestinian and Israeli social movements strongly criticize processes of supposed negotiation which respond to an imperialistic design and to Israeli interests. They continue to call for a legitimate political solution which rests upon the creation of new forms of reaction, resistance and the capacity to put forward alternative proposals. Within the framework of international relations controlled by the powers allied to Israel, thinking, planning and acting together becomes more urgent than ever. Joining forces is necessary to arrive at a better understanding of the complexity of the conflict, as well as to develop mechanisms to act upon and transform this reality.

3. The voice of social movements against the occupation nevertheless causes some

irritation. Some elements prefer to keep realities invisible, silent as to any practical effect. For Zionists, uncompromising Israeli social movements in solidarity with the Palestinian cause are an uncomfortable element of their society, holding a mirror up to their own violence. The fact that they are few does not keep them from being qualitatively significant. They remind Israeli society of an uncomfortable truth: their government treats Palestinians in a fascist manner. The time will come when the perseverance and clarity of principles in these movements will see their triumph. Social movements are pointing a finger at the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), accusing them of defending poor policies and asserting ineffective leadership in negotiations with Israel. In reality the situation is the same there as everywhere else in the world: social movements think too much. They are too free.

4. The Palestinian and Israeli social movements are called upon to convey the tragedy of their every day lives to the rest of the World. Organized around thematic axes, they are in a position to inform, denounce and insist upon putting an end to the atrocities, advancing the formation of international support networks. This is

especially relevant at a time when public opinion understands this conflict to be concerned with an issue of national borders, instead of an issue between occupiers and occupied. We are convinced that public opinion and the media have the power to turn the course of events. It is possible to expose the true face of the occupiers.

5. These networks and alliances between Palestinians and Israelis must have an active and innovative international support. This transnational unity responds to the following needs:

► The accumulation of social and political power can lead to the capacity to exert pressure over an opaque and globalized world, with the aim of influencing international organizations which play a role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is important to inform the world about what is going on in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem and in the interior of Israel.

► A general framework of agreement amongst civil society is needed, as well as the recovery of political action amongst different segments of society, in order to monitor and censor the work of institutions and political parties. In the struggle against Zionism, the globalization of solidarity is of strategic importance.

6. The international dimension of the Palestinian cause is very important. We are dealing with a conflict with international roots which may only find a just solution through the participation of the international community. The Bilbao Initiative "For a just peace in Palestine" is a step forward in the process of building a transnational network to influence the policies of institutions and governments. We are united by:

► Being part of a moral rebellion which openly and radically says NO to current Israeli policies and radically demands the rights of the Palestinian people.

► The criticism and denunciation of governments and organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations which, in the name of political realism, act in total connivance with Zionist policy even if this means violating human rights and is obviously illegal

► The strength of the vision "Another World is Possible" meaning that we are united in protest as well as in local and global efforts to design alternatives for the freedom of peoples.

► The exercise of critical thinking and the aspiration to reach a strong social revitalization that leads to that other world that is necessary, as well as possible.

We, the networks, organizations, research and academic centers, and social movements, have decided to call for a forum entitled The Bilbao Initiative: Towards a Just Peace in Palestine. We do so in response to

the initiative of the MEWANDO Network and other social networks in the Middle East and Europe, which, after the Palestinian-Israeli-European forum and the Palestinian-Israeli meeting organized in Bilbao in October 2003,

believe that just peace can only be achieved with an organized civil society and on the basis of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the right to self determination.

Document of Reference for The Bilbao Initiative

A PNGO, ITTIJAH, AIC, ECCP Y MEWANDO
 1 During the past years, war, occupation and foreign domination have been spreading across the Middle East, resulting in atrocities, destruction, war crimes and grave violations of the fundamental rights of people. This scenario is particularly serious in the Israeli-Palestinian colonial conflict, where Israel -- with active political, diplomatic and economic support from world powers, particularly the US and the EU -- has for sixty years sought to control as much of historic Palestine with as few of its original inhabitants as possible. The Oslo process and the Road Map which stemmed

The Oslo process and the Road Map ignored the basic requirements of justice for establish a lasting peace.

from the Madrid Middle East peace conference in 1991 ignored the basic requirements for justice and therefore failed to establish enduring peace, security or prosperity in Palestine and the region. Most recently, the Annapolis Conference, designed to serve the narrow interests of the US administration in the region, entirely ignored not only the tenets of international law but also the main requisites for a just resolution of the conflict. In fact, all these governmental initiatives are viewed in the region as attempts to cover up and control an ongoing process of colonization of the Palestinian territory, of social and economic destabilization, and of progressive deterioration of living conditions in the region. Three basic requirements for justice and lasting, comprehensive peace are:

1 An end to the Israeli occupation and colonization of the occupied Arab and Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem

2. The recognition and implementation of the rights of Palestinian refugees, including their right to return to their lands and properties, in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III)



A young Palestinian walking by the Wall.

3. The elimination of the Israeli system of racial discrimination against and legitimization of the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

We believe that creative and effective support for the Palestinian civil society's unified Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with its obligations under international law is the most morally and politically sound instrument of solidarity in the struggle for freedom, equality and a just peace.

Today, representatives of European civil society are inviting their counterparts from the region to establish a civil agenda for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and to collectively and

effectively organize in order to pressure governments, as well as local and international institutions, to contribute to justice and peace in the region. This civil assembly fully respects and promotes the inalienable right of all the people in the region to live in peace, freedom, equality and dignity, in compliance with international law and the principles of universal human rights.

For this reason, "The Bilbao Initiative: Towards a Just Peace in Palestine" convenes this special assembly, sharing the deep concerns and the demands expressed in the successive reports of the UN's special rapporteur for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, John Dugard, to

promote the urgent and multilateral search for a just and lasting peace based on international law, the pertinent UN resolutions and the consultative opinion of the International

Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, which condemned the illegality of the Israeli Wall and settlements established on occupied Palestinian and Arab land.

By launching this process, the Bilbao Initiative builds upon successive declarations in 2007 issued by the European Coordinating Committee on the question of Palestine (ECCP) on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the occupation of the Palestinian territories on the resolution by the Spanish Congress of

Deputies, and on the joint declaration by the parliamentary Intergroup for Palestine and the Solidarity network against the occupation of Palestine.

Giving voice to civil society, which has fought for years to promote justice and peace in Palestine and the region, is a duty of all those organizations and citizens who believe a better world is possible and are working towards it. Our joint struggle must be solidly based on:

- ▶▶ Acceptance of international law.
- ▶▶ Agreement on the equality of all humans -- regardless of gender, religion or origin - and therefore equal entitlement to all human rights.
- ▶▶ Commitment to ending colonial, racist and social oppression.

THE SITUATION IN PALESTINE

Since the year 2000, Israel's colonial and racist policies against the Palestinian people have continued to worsen, manifesting themselves in THE repeated use of collective punishment, massive colonization and the construction of the Apartheid Wall on occupied land; plundering of Palestinian natural resources, fragmentation of Palestinian society, demolition of homes,, denial of basic freedoms through siege and constant military incursions, incarceration of thousands of political prisoners, hindering access to education and health services, indiscriminate killings of civilians (a third of whom were children), systematic destruction of Palestinian civil and social infrastructures, and the substantial devastation of Palestinian farm lands and the environment. In 2006, following the exercise



of their democratic right to freely elect their representatives, the Palestinians were subjected to what started as a severe economic and financial blockade imposed by Israel, the US and the EU and later developed into a full-fledged siege of 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, described by ranking UN officials and human rights organizations as a war crime. A recent EU decision aimed at upgrading the EU-Israel Association Agreement, despite Israel's serious and persistent violation of the human rights clause of the

Agreement, is widely viewed by Palestinian civil society and its international supporters as part of a recurrent complicity in Israel's occupation and human rights violations.

The current situation in the region, 60 years after the establishment of the State of Israel through the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, or the Nakba, after 41 years of continuous Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms, 5 years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, is reaching a boiling point. This and the intensifying US-Israeli threats of war against Iran -- and earlier, Syria - confirm the need for effective and urgent solidarity, as well as a regional and multilateral approach that conforms to international law and universal principles of human rights.



A man observes the ruins of his demolished home in the Gaza Strip.

Popular resistance in Palestine: The case of Bil'in and Nil'in

These two Palestinian villages have become examples of resistance to Israeli occupation.

MIREIA GALLARDO AND ALBERTO ARCE
In February of 2005, the Committee for Popular Resistance at a small town called Bil'in, near Rammallah, and which has lost 60% of its land to the Wall built to protect the settlement of Modit Ilin, started to organize weekly peaceful protests against the construction of this Apartheid Wall. Each Friday, for more than three years, the inhabitants of Bil'in carried out their resistance activities against the bulldozers of the Israeli army. This way they successfully transmitted the image that Palestinian resistance has never stopped. And not just armed resistance; a joint Palestinian-Israeli resistance against the Occupation supported by activists from all over the world, also exists.

When the inhabitants of Bil'in took their case to Israeli justice, they were able to achieve a sort of victory which time has proven to be more moral and symbolic in its nature than practical. On the 7th of September of 2007, the Israeli Supreme Court ordered the government to modify the route which was being used to build the wall across Bil'in on the basis that it was "highly detrimental" to its inhabitants. Judge Dorit Beinisch declared: "we are not convinced that building the wall in Bil'in responds to military or security motives". However, by mid 2008, the Israeli lawyer Michael Sfarad, who is representing the case of Bil'in inhabitants, is still demanding that the Israeli army respect the Supreme Court's final decision.

Increasing repression

From April 2008, the case of the struggle of Bil'in has extended to Nil'in, a village of similar characteristics, where the Apartheid Wall threatens to dispossess villagers from their agricultural fields. As bulldozers have moved closer to the village, hundreds of protesters have managed to greatly slow

the construction work by sabotaging the machines. The residents of this small town have lost significant portions of their land to the Nakba or the 1948 expulsion. After the Six Day War in 1967 Israel began to confiscate more of their lands. Seventy four dunums (one dunum equals one hectare) were occupied at first to establish the Jewish colony of Shilat. 661 dunums were further seized for the Jewish settlement of Mattityahu. In 1985, 934 more dunums were used to build the colony of Hashmona'im and six years later 276 dunums more were destined to the settlement of Mod'in Illit. Finally, in 1998, more than 20 dunums were occupied by Jewish settlers founding the colony of Menorah. Adding up the surface area which is covered by all of these colonies amounts to more than 13% of the land of Nil'in expropriated since 1967. If the Wall is completed, 2,500 dunums, that is, approximately 20% of the Palestinian land of Nil'in, will be confiscated.

The direct sabotage of bulldozers building the wall is having severe effects on their efficiency. Israel has decided to repress this popular resistance movement in their usual manner; through the use of brutal and disproportionate violence. First they imposed a curfew. During the first three days ambulances were prohibited from entering the villages, a pregnant woman was not able to leave Nil'in and arrive at the hospital to give birth. She was forced to deliver her baby in her own house. But this situation is encountered on a daily basis in the Occupied Territories. A 12 year old child was kidnapped for two days by Israeli soldiers. This too happens every day. Eventually death arrived. This also happens every day. Two young boys were murdered by snipers when they participated in demonstrations. 11 year old Ahmed Hosam Mousa was killed on the 29th of July and Yusuf Ahmad Amira, 17 years old, was killed on the 4th of August.



Young Palestinians demonstrating against the wall that confiscates part of their land in Nil'in



The Apartheid Wall was declared illegal by the International Court of Justice on July 9, 2004

THE USE OF VIOLENCE AS PUNISHMENT

Why have there not been any deaths (up until now) in Bil'in as there have been in Nil'in? The army does not kill randomly; it kills strategically, in retaliation and to transmit a message. Israel does not want the model of popular resistance against the Wall to extend, let alone, for it to be known and publicized abroad. Only a few days before the first death, on the 25th of July, a home made recording by a girl from Nil'in shared with the world the image of an Israeli soldier shooting Ashraf Abu Rahme's leg, surrounded by his co-soldiers and taking orders from his superior. Ashraf Abu Rahme, 27 years old, was handcuffed and blindfolded;

he was just a meter away from the Israeli soldier. For quite some time now, the Israeli human rights organization Bet'selem distributes hundreds of video cameras amongst Palestinian children in order for them to document these kinds of cases. The image of Nil'in went around the world, making its way through mayor television channels and provoking a wave of indignation which Israel refuses to assume since it challenges the Israeli vision of an army respectful of the human rights of the Palestinians and, above all, at it challenges the consistent myth of Israel classifying itself as the "only democracy in the Middle East".

LACK OF COVERAGE OF THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI-INTERNATIONAL RESISTANCE TRIANGLE

We should ask ourselves why international media does not cover the campaigns of villages like Bil'in or Nil'in, from the civil resistance and direct action against a Wall which has been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice. The reason is simple; they would break with the canonical vision that presents Palestinian resistance as a form of terrorism and so justifies Israeli responses to maintain security. Whilst isolated actions with excavators in Jerusalem are considered terrorist and are deemed to deserve profuse coverage and live connections on our televisions, peaceful activities in Bil'in and Nil'in

are systematically silenced or, when covered, are described as isolated and individual actions which are responded to immediately by Israel as a country which respect for the rule of law. Another aspect of the struggle lies in the number of Israeli and international activists that join in, challenging official narratives of the conflict. Immediately after the diffusion of the images of a handcuffed and blindfolded man being shot in cold blood, 23 Israeli anarchists were violently arrested in Tel Aviv while they carried out an Argentinean-style "escrache" at the house of the military commander

in chief responsible for the troops at Nil'in. In the last three years more than two dozen international activists have been either arrested or deported because of their participation in protests against the Wall at Bil'in.

TRAVEL TO PALESTINE

Palestinian civil society requires a systematic flow of people who visit them in order to support their cause. This can be done through brigades of political solidarity, or through your participation in direct action against the occupation. Groups are organized every year from different organizations of the

Spanish State, brigades in summer, and independent activists who travel to join the ISM on their own. If you wish to join the ISM on the ground (Nil'in and Bil'in) you may contact them through their webpage. If you wish to travel in these organized groups, you may contact any of the following addresses
-For the ISM: www.palsolidarity.org
Komite Internazionalistak, Euskadi Kibilibo/herriak.org
Xarxa de Enllac amb Palestina, Catalunya: internacional@xarxapalestina.org
SODEPAZ, Madrid: ejverdu@sodepaz.net



'Baza on our minds' reads the sign that a girl Lodz up during a demonstration in Nablus

EXAMPLES OF THE ISRAELI APARTHEID SYSTEM

Persecution of Arab deputies at the Knesset

The criminalization and expulsion of the Arab members of the Israeli Parliament exemplify the working of a State which "denies the rights of those who are not Jews"

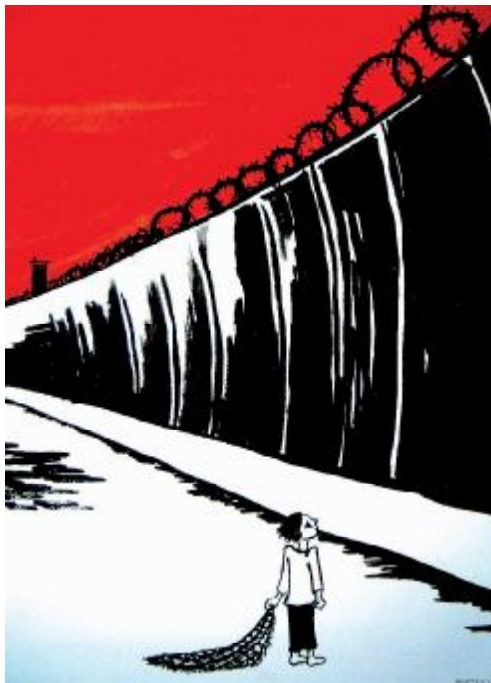
BY MEWANDO

A verbal incident discloses the current situation and the menaces that an important Arab minority inside Israel (20% of the population) must face. On March the 14th, 2008, the Arab deputy Jamal Zahalka, of the political party Balad was expelled from the Israeli Knesset after an intense debate with the deputy of the National Union Efitim. Responding to a Palestinian protest in Umm Al Faehem, the latter had declared: "one day we will expel all of you from our home, the national home of the Jewish people", to which the Arab deputy replied: "you are crazy and

"One day we will expel you from the national home of the Jewish people", said Efitim, deputy of the National Union Party

a miserably racist". This was enough of a reason for Jamal Zahalka to be unilaterally expelled from the parliament while the rest of the deputies applauded for the man who had initially threatened him. Does this reflect an ordinary parliamentary dispute? Or is it a graphic and evident example of an Israeli policy to expel all Palestinians living within Israeli borders, namely the Palestinians of 48, manifested in the problems encountered by their representatives in parliament?

Jamal Zahalka has not been the only Arab member of the Israeli Knesset to encounter problems with the law. In April 2007 deputy Azmi Bishara, founder of the Balad party, exiled himself when he started to suspect that he would be taken to court without sufficient guarantees and incarcerated for a long period of time. Immediately his parliamentary immunity was withdrawn. He was accused of having sold information to Hezbollah concerning targets which could be bombed in Israel in exchange for large sums of money.



The South African Bastutanes were not walled in.

Azmi Bishara responded to these accusations and, after having been interrogated on several occasions by Shin Bet (Israel's Internal Security Service) he decided to take refuge abroad. As he published before he left, "the accusations against me are ridiculous, explanations are not necessary. Hezbollah has got more information about Israel than any single member of the Knesset could have ever facilitated. Moreover, contrary to many Israeli parliamentarians who have been directly involved

in acts of violence, I have never participated in any war. My only tools of persuasion have been my words, my speeches, my articles and my books (...). The charges against me, which I reject with all my might, have been made up and they represent nothing more than a long series of attempts to silence me and many others who are committed to the struggle of Palestinian citizens in Israel to live in a state for all its citizens and not a state which guarantees rights to Jews and denies them for non-Jews".



The Temporary Citizenship Law

Since 2003 nationality has been denied to Palestinians married to Israeli citizens.

BY MEWANDO

The proposal to take away citizenship of Arab members of the Knesset had already been passed for the ordinary citizens in the year 2003 when the Israeli Executive presented a the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Provision) which established discrimination against citizens of Arab origin in relation to their marriage. The law prevented the Israeli Ministry of Interior from issuing residence permits to people originally from Judea and Samaria (known as West Bank or Occupied Palestinian Territories under International Law). This means that if an Israeli citizen (regardless of gender) marries a citizen from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the later may not receive a residence permit to live in Israel. This effectively enforces separation of couple, or forces them to leave Israel and obtain residence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or in a third country. The law exempts citizens of Jewish religion, that is, settlers. Moreover, the authority to study applications one by one is granted to al Shin Bet (Israel's Internal Security Service) which, for security reasons again, is not obliged to submit the evidence it has used to inform its decisions if brought in front of a civil court.

In 2005, a report by Amnesty International about Israel gathered the declarations of two Prime Ministers who advocated the Citizenship and Entry law. According to Ariel Sharon "We do not need to

hide behind security motives. We need to guarantee the existence of a Jewish state" and, as Benjamin Netanyahu assured to Haaretz Newspaper, "Instead of making it easy for Palestinians to obtain citizenship, we must make it more difficult for them in order to protect the Jewish majority". More details concerning the legal work that is being done against the Law may be found at the webpage of Adalah, the Centre of Legal Rights for the Arab minority of Israel (www.adalah.org)

Racist Law

In 2006 and after several appeals presented by Human Rights organizations in courts, the Law was declared "contrary to the basic laws of the State" because it violates "the law of liberty and human dignity" (Israel does not have a constitution nor recognized borders and it is ruled since its creation by a combination of basic exceptional laws). The Israeli Supreme Court, alleging the law was a temporary measure, decided not to suspend its application, even though it had been considered illegal. When a law is deemed exceptional and temporary, as well as openly discriminatory, forcing a portion of its citizens to abandon the country according to the nationality of their spouse, and it remains in effect for 5 years for security reasons, in spite of having been declared illegal, we can begin to assimilate the fact that Israel is not a state respectful of democratic "rule of law".

DE FACTO EXPULSION OF JERUSALEM RESIDENTS

The best example illustrating the situation of Jerusalem residents may be found in the case of Emile Saman Ashrawi, daughter of Hanan Ashrawi, Ex-Palestinian Minister and member of virtually all teams negotiating with Israeli authorities. In the summer of 2008, Emile Ashrawi, who lives in the United States, saw how the Israeli Embassy in the United States denied her a visa to visit Jerusalem, her city of birth, the way she did every year. The explanation is simple: residence and travel permits for

Jerusalem residents are issued, validated and annulled by Israelis at their will. Each time a resident (needless to say, an Arab resident) from Jerusalem wants to travel abroad he/she must ask for an exit permit. Likewise, they need a permit to return through the checkpoint at Allenby bridge on the border with Jordan. Residents of the Occupied Territories are not authorized to use the airport in Tel Aviv. Israel arbitrarily and systematically refuses the return of individuals considered "a mena-



ce to state security", depriving them in this way of their capacity to exercise their legal rights. Due to "security reasons" Palestinian defense lawyers are not allowed to access the accusations and information about their clients in the Shin Bet archives. Israeli law dictates that anyone who lives outside of Jerusalem for 7 years loses their right to return to the city. In practice, migration authorities deny access and right of return to any Arab citizen who has a residence permit in any other

country. Meanwhile, Jewish newcomers are never asked about their dual nationality, held by all new Jewish immigrants. The Israeli NGO Hamoked (<http://www.hamoked.org/>), amongst many other legal activities, keeps records and follows up on cases of legal problems about citizens' rights. As has been extensively documented, relatives of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails have been denied entry into the country, preventing families from seeing each other for years, even for a few

minutes. Palestinians are unable to denounce the damages caused by the Israeli army in Occupied Territories. Not only are Palestinians prevented from traveling between Gaza and the West Bank and abroad, Israeli Human Rights organizations are not allowed to represent them in courts, providing an example of how the principle of judicial tutelage, elementary to protect the rights of a religious or ethnic minority in any state respectful of the rule of law, is absent in Israel.



The Israeli army represses a demonstration against the construction work on the wall at Nil'in.

Why the term Apartheid?

The transformation of the conflict in Palestine into a fight for civil rights like the South African model worries the Israeli government

BY MEWANDO

The term Apartheid lets us travel conceptually from Algeria to South Africa. From a paradigm of national liberation to one of civil rights. From the obsession with statism to the pragmatism of democracy and justice. One man, one woman, one vote. Equal rights and an end to all segregation. Through creative, democratic and integrative nonviolent action which involves the entire population. Recovery of international support, as the example of first Intifada of 1987. To speak of Apartheid would mean the end of the Zionist project of a state designed exclusively for Jews which disregards its

original population before the arrival of the colonists. This would be gained through the struggle that increases awareness in Europe of the tragedy of the Palestinian people and which, at the same time, allows European governments and citizens to think outside of the box and beyond the current lack of initiative in relation to its traditional support for the Palestinian cause. The demand to revise - even to suspend - the preferential economic agreement between Israel and EU of March 2009 is the horizon for the start of a new political and strategic era regarding Palestinian in Europe.

The new Palestinian position is marked by the final report last summer of the Palestine Strategy Group,

formed by intellectuals, and political activists from a range of political sensitivities that has been working together for years with funding from the European Union and support from an Oxford based research group. During the official presentation of the report, one of its team investigators, Sam Bahour clearly defined "the eternal peace process which has created an industry of peace in Palestine, financed by contributors from the entire planet, does not have the intention of achieving peace with justice, rather it seems geared to fragment Palestinian aspirations into separate entities with separate status, the anti-

thesis of any form of sovereignty". According to the same report, the basis for this affirmation lies in the fact that "the demand of a state over 22% of historical Palestine means 50% of land less than the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine of 1947. Palestinians have already made a concession without precedent. If Israel is unable to accept this, there is little else to talk about"

A new logic of the conflict

The then Vice-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2003 already assured, "Palestinians are less and less interested in a negotiated solution of two

states. They are interested in transforming the logic of the conflict from an Algerian paradigm to a South African paradigm. From a struggle against occupation - using their own terms of reference - to a struggle for equality. This obviously is a much cleaner fight, much more popular, and ultimately, much more powerful. This could mean the end of the Jewish state". In November of 2007, now as Prime Minister, he reinforced his declarations insisting that "to confront a civil rights movement like the South African would put an end to the State of Israel. Our friends from outside would immediately turn their backs to us, especially in Europe"

HOUSE DEMOLITION POLICY IN EAST JERUSALEM

The Israeli Committee against House Demolition (www.icahd.org) is one of the organisations which has best documented the persistent destruction of Palestinian houses by Israel. The argument is usually the following: no Arab construction in Jerusalem is licensed to be where it is according to Israeli law - which is subsequent to the constructions and has never legalized them. Obviously, the law does not decree their immediate destruction. But up against the most

minimal reform that the Palestinian owners should wish to carry out in their homes, the municipality immediately emits an order declaring the houses had never received authorization to be built and they are demolished. At the same time, the construction work on the Apartheid Wall across Jerusalem has led to the demolition of homes that were on its way, and has left many others physically outside of the city, depriving the community of territorial continuity and depriving its people of ac-

cess to jobs, education or health, and eventually, of their residence permits. Amos Gvirtz, the President of ICADH says clearly: "Let no one say they didn't know it was happening"; Dozens of organizations are describing this situation, beginning with the eloquent maps printed by OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) which may be consulted on the following webpage (www.ochaonline.un.org) on a monthly basis.



Checkpoints and roads for exclusive use of colonists.

Campaign for the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions against the State of Israel

The option of the boycott against the State of Israel in its economic, cultural, sports and political aspects is one of the main nonviolent means of fighting against the occupation

The broad consensus among Palestinian civil society about the need for a broad and sustained Campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) resulted in the Palestinian joint call that was launched in July 2005 with the initial endorsement of over 170 Palestinian organizations. The call has been renewed on diverse occasions, the last this year, 2008, on the 60th anniversary of the Nakba, or ethnic cleansing, when the State of Israel was created in 1948 after the expulsion of more than 8000,000 Palestinians from their homes and the destruction of 400 localities.

The signatories of this call represent the three major components of the Palestinian people: the refugees in exile, Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Palestinians of the Israeli state. The efforts to coordinate the BDS campaign, that began to grow rapidly since the 2005 call was made public, culminated in the first Palestinian BDS Conference

One of the main victories from the boycott was the breakdown of Apartheid in South Africa in the decade of the 1990's

In Palestine, one of the objectives is the application of sanctions in the framework of Israel's continuous violation of international law

held in Ramallah in November 2007. Out of this conference emerged the BDS National Committee (BNC) as a coordinating body for the BDS campaign within Palestine. The goals of the BNC are:

- ▶▶ To strengthen and spread the culture of Boycott as a central form of civil resistance to Israeli occupation and apartheid.
- ▶▶ To formulate strategies and programs of action in accordance with the 9 July 2005 Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS.
- ▶▶ To form the Palestinian reference point for BDS campaigns worldwide
- ▶▶ To form the national reference point for the anti-normalization campaigns within Palestine
- ▶▶ To coordinate the various BDS campaign efforts in all locations
- ▶▶ To organize a yearly conference of the organizations and initiatives involved in the BDS campaign.

What does Boycott mean?

This refers to a democratic, creative and participative tool of non-violent resistance. A boycott is a specific action with the objective of correcting a distinctly



Palestinians have never stopped resisting the construction of the Apartheid Wall

reprehensible act. The coordinated action of different social agents: citizens, NGOs, trade unions, political parties, associations and, eventually, private businesses and governments is imperative in order to see a Boycott through.

Whether a boycott is extended in time, or is part of a broad program of public awareness or of legal and regime reform, it may be exercised through ethical consumption or through pressure put on the participation of representatives of the country in all types of activities, including cultural and sportive events. One of the most significant victories of boycott was its crucial role catalyzing the breakdown of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, with the aid of a campaign of commercial isolation (divestment) during the 1980s. In the case of Palestine, one of the objectives is the application of legal sanctions in the framework of Israel's continuous violation of international law, especially in relation to its preferential economic agreement with the European Union.

Lessons from the case of South Africa

People and institutions involved in culture, such as Ken Loach, Jean-Luc Godard or the Irish Artists' Syndicate have joined the cultural boycott of Israel.

OMAR BARGHOUTI, MIEMBRO DE PACBI*

A large majority of Palestinian artists and cultural workers appealed to all artists and filmmakers around the world to immediately "cancel all performances and other cultural events that are scheduled to occur in Israel and not allow the continuation of the Israeli offensive to breed complacency." As with the boycott of South African cultural institutions during apartheid, international cultural workers and groups are urged by their Palestinian colleagues to

"speak out against the current Israeli war crimes and atrocities." Many internationally recognized artists and intellectuals have already heeded the Palestinian appeal for boycott; those included John Berger, Ken Loach, Jean-Luc Godard, the Irish artists union, AOSDANA, and Belgian dance company Les Ballets C. de la B. It is felt that the cultural boycott is "a legitimate, unambiguous and nonviolent way of exerting pressure on those responsible."

In 1965, the American Committee on Africa, following the lead of prominent British arts associations, sponsored a historic declaration against South African apartheid, signed by more than 60 cultural personalities. It read: "We say no to apartheid. We take this pledge in solemn resolve to refuse any encouragement of, or indeed, any professional association with the present Republic of South Africa, until the day when all its people shall equally enjoy the educational and cultural advantages of that rich and beautiful land."

Some might argue that art should transcend political division, unifying people in their common humanity. They seem to forget that masters and slaves do not share anything in common, least of all any notion of humanity. Rather than reinventing the wheel, I recall the wise words of Enuga S. Reddy, director of the United Nations Center Against Apartheid, who in 1984 responded



to criticism that the cultural boycott of South Africa infringed on freedom of expression, saying: "It is rather strange, to say the least, that the South African regime which denies all freedoms... to the African majority... should become a defender of the freedom of artists and sportsmen of the world. We have a list of people who have performed in South Africa because of ignorance of the situation or the lure of money or collaboration with racism. They need to be persuaded to stop entertaining apartheid, to stop profiting from apartheid money and to stop serving the propaganda purposes of the apartheid regime."

*Palestinian campaign for the Academia and Cultural Boycott of Israel

MEMBERS OF THE BNC

Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO)
Occupied Palestine and Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (OP-GAI)
Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (Stop the Wall)
Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)
Ittijah: Union of Arab Community Based Associations
Council of National and Islamic Forces in



Palestine
Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU)
General Union of Palestinian Workers
Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition

Federation of Unions of Palestinian Universities' Professors and Employees
General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW)
Charitable Organizations Union Independent
Federation of Unions - Palestine (IFU)
Palestinian Farmers Union (PFU)
National Committee for the Commemoration of the Nakba
Civil Coalition for Defending the Palestinians' Rights in Jerusalem

"We ask for the suspension of the European Union Association Agreement with Israel"

On the past 16th of June, the European Union and Israel agreed to update their relationship within the framework of the Association Agreement between

EU-Israel.. This started a process which is to end in April of 2009 subsequent to arriving at a definition for a common Plan of Action which implies the

adoption of initiatives and the creation of a broad spectrum of stronger ties in economic, commercial, academic, security and diplomatic fields.

Legal and moral considerations aside, the pragmatic affirmation is that increased commitment with Israel will enable Europe more leverage to promote peace in the region. This argument is very similar to the arguments of "constructive commitment" which were used to justify international relations with the system of Apartheid in South Africa. The warm embrace of Europe toward Israel has only encouraged the later to further entrench its occupation and ignore its obligations vis a vis international law. More than 100 organizations in Palestinian, Israeli and European civil society have joined the growing movement in support of the Palestinian call to Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, demanding responsibilities and putting pressure on governments to enact sanctions and embargoes.

On the 10th of July, Maria Luisa Huidobro, General Subdirector for the Middle East in the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs received Omar Barghouti, member of the Palestinian National BDS Committee and Michael Warsavsky, President of the Alternative Information Centre of Jerusalem, accompanied by Santiago González, Jose Verdú and Alberto Arce, members of the Spanish State Network against the occupation of Palestine.

Santiago González, of the CSCA, opened the meeting pointing out that "as representatives of the Spanish State Network against the occupation of Palestine, we want to make known the reality of what is happening in the Occupied Territories after the failure of Annapolis, in order to see what policies may be best applied from our country in the quest for justice for Palestine" According to Alberto Arce, of MEWANDO "We perceive a large gap between the positions of Palestinian civil society - which, by definition, constitute the analytical bases the social organizations of the Spanish State share- and those held by our political representatives, distanced from reality, in the hope that they will not continue to defend the opinions and policies of Israel forever"

"The law of the jungle"

Omar Barghouti, member of the Palestinian Campaign to Boycott Israel: "The time will come when the Palestinian Nuremberg arrives for European leaders who are collaborating and supporting crimes in Israel". Barghouti presented an analysis of the current political context in Palestine and in the region. In relation to European policies on the Middle East he believes that "Europe has betrayed the principles on which it built its position on the Palestinian cause and international law".

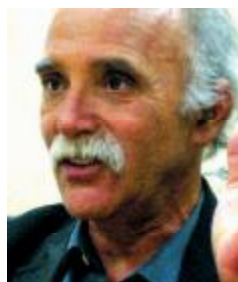
Barghouti maintains that Europe has allowed the Middle East to evolve from the rule of law to the rule of the fittest, approving policies that disregard previous agreements and international law: "We have witnessed the legitimization of the law of the jungle". Warning of the consequences these policies will bring, he says "If Europe continues to turn its back on the demands of civil society and to support illegitimate governments, it may only expect to receive an even larger wave of immigration, alongside an increase of terrorist activities on their territory due to the desperation and ab-



The entrance to the city of Bethlehem is totally closed by the Apartheid Wall



Omar Barghouti, member of the Palestinian Campaign to Boycott Israel.



Michael Warsavsky, president of the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem.



Maria Luisa Huidobro, general subdirector of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

sence of other prospects for large segments of the population". For Barghouti, "The regimes of Europe's Arab allies are illegitimate and will melt like an ice cream abandoned under the summer sun in the context of increasing popular discontent"

According to Omar Barghouti "we are surprised by this new way of interpreting democracy and justice in Europe. We understand that anyone who believes in justice should push to see the law and approved agreements enforced, and not turn a blind eye to their infringement. "Where Israel is concerned, we stop worrying about Human Rights" Such seems to be the message transmitted by the decision to upgrade relations between Israel and Europe. Authoritative voices are warning of a

prelude to genocide and of a continuing and systematic collective punishment of Palestine, whilst Benita Ferrero Waldner (European Commissioner for Foreign Affairs) and Javier Solana transmit a clear message: Europe does not intend to monitor Israel's behavior, it intends to validate it with awards". He insists: "The time will come when the Palestinian Nuremberg arrives for European leaders who are collaborating and supporting crimes in Israel"

On the topic of peace processes, he concludes that "there isn't an absence of peace, there is an absence of a process. Talking about establishing links with an inexistent process is lying to a population at a time when the real links being made are with complicity in war crimes". He recognizes that "increasing the mil-

lions of euros of aid to the region does little to help since it encourages a situation of complacency with injustice. The policy of silencing and hiding the reality of the occupation through the channeling of financial aid, obliterates occupation from the scene and keeps it from being considered in political dialogue"

EU complicity

Michael Warschawski, fundador del AI-Michael Warsavsky, founder of the Alternative Information Center of Jerusalem: "In South Africa a political position was adopted and Apartheid was defeated" Warsavsky wants to conclude the meeting by highlighting that "European donations are important, but not buying

them off Israel and using them as an excuse to avoid working to defeat the occupation. What Europe labels as establishing "positive links with the peace process" is rewarding impunity. Improving Israeli status in Europe is the institutionalization of European connivance with Israeli crimes. You are not simply the main economic partner but the mirror in which Israeli society wishes to see its reflection. Palestine does not suffer from a tsunami, it suffers from Israeli policies". And he insists: "we do not want more money at the expense of the political complicity with the Occupation that we are witnessing. With South Africa a political position was adopted and apartheid was defeated. Maria Luisa Huidobro maintained her position: "We believe that the closer Israeli society is to Europe, the better the process will go". The sub-director analyses the common European policy on the matter, defined as "Constructive commitment with Israel" and defends the official Spanish position based on the idea that "the closer Israeli society is to Europe, the better the process will go. If we were to establish severe conditionality it would be worst for the peace process. The difference today compared to a few months ago is that we are closer to achieving established agreements. At least there is some hope, that of respecting the borders of Gaza. We believe this is the chief direction we are to take in order to promote internal dialogue within Palestine without which the peace agreements which have been reached will be impossible to materialize".

Bilbao Initiative

Towards a just peace in Palestine.

Where?

Lan Ekintza, Uribitarte nº6 - 1ª planta (Bilbao)

**Wednesday, October 29th 2008. 19.00 h.****Working framework and situation in Palestine.**

Welcoming by a member of Basque Government.

Suha Barghouti. PNGO. General Union of Palestinian Women.

MEWANDO

From Besieged Gaza to colonized Jerusalem: Israeli war crimes

Raji Sourani. Director. Palestinian Center for Human Rights. Besieged Gaza Strip.

Hussein Abu Hussein. Palestinian lawyer in the State of Israel. Chair of the Board. Ittijah.

Rana Nashashibi. Civic coalition for defending Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem.

Thursday, October 30th**PANEL 1: Political Impasse. The role of International Community.**

Phyllis Bennis. Institute for Policy Studies. Washington. Fellow at the Transnational Institute. Amsterdam.

Norman Finkelstein. Political Science Ph.D. Princeton University.

Mustafa Barghouti. Former Minister of Information. Palestinian Government of National Unity.

Rapporteur: Isaias Barreñada. Political Scientist. Madrid.

PANEL 2: Palestinian Refugees rights: moral, legal and possible.

Karma Nabulsi. Fellow at St Edmund Mary College. Oxford University.

Eitan Bronstein. Director of Zochrot.

Salman Abu Sitta. Former member of Palestinian National Council. Founder of Palestine Land Society.

Rapporteur: Teresa Aranguren. Writer and journalist focused on Near East.

PANEL 3: Israel: Between colonialism and institutionalised racism.

Moshe Machover. Kings College, Researcher. London. Founding member of Matzpen.

Nadim Rouhana. Teacher and researcher. George Mason University. Director of Mada Al Carmel. Haifa.

Rapporteur: Carlos Alberto Ruiz. MUNDUBAT. Federation of Human Rights associations of Spain.

PANEL 4: The Palestinian BDS campaign. Civil resistance and effective solidarity.

Sue Blackwell. Birmingham University teacher focused on Palestine and South Africa.

Salim Vally. Witwatersrand Johannesburg University teacher. South Africa.

Omar Barghouti. Founding member of PACBI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott to Israel).

Rapporteur: Paul Nicholson. Farmer. European representative. Via Campesina. Transnational Farmer's organization.

Friday, October 31st.**Workshop 1: Bringing Palestine back on the political map.**

Issam Aruri. Member of the board. PNGO. Director of Jerusalem Legal Aid Center.

Haneen Zubay. Director: l'am - Media Center for Palestinian Arabs in the State of Israel.

Workshop 2: Connecting the right with the Return.

Mohammad Jaradat. Member of the board. BADIL. Resources Center for the rights of Palestinian refugees.

Workshop 3: Re-defining Israel: legal and political prospects.

Iyad Rabi. Palestinian Lawyer in the State of Israel. Director of Ahali Center for Community Development

Sergio Yahni. Director. Alternative Information Center. Jerusalem.

Workshop 4: Mainstreaming BDS in Europe and the world.

Astri Neuhoff. Independent consultant in strategic planning with Stop the Wall, PNGO Ittijah y OPGAL.

Jamal Jumah. Coordinator Stop the Wall. Member of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign National Committee.

Yael Lezer. Israeli editor. Of arabic literature into Hebrew.

Closing session: Towards a joint action plan against Israeli War Crimes.

Dr. Allam Jarrar. Medical Relief Society. West Bank.

Dr. Rabbah Mohannas. Health Work Committees. Besieged Gaza Strip.

Pierre Galand. ECCP European Coordination Committees for Palestine.

A member of MEWANDO network

Methodology for the Bilbao Initiative

The Bilbao Initiative will start with this Civil Society Assembly to coordinate strategies which will, take place in Bilbao on October 29th (opening session) 30th (Panels) and 31st (working sessions) (2008).

►► It is not a "Palestinian civil society" initiative but an initiative of the networks that are working together naming PNGO, Ittijah, AIC and promoted by MEWANDO

►► We understand this initiative as part of a process looking for new ways to express solidarity with the Palestinian people and we will try to maintain continuity with other initiatives that we will try to organize in order to be more effective in our joint work.

►► That the initiative is not a "forum" trying to decide political positions or "drawing a line". It is conceived as a space for debate, to unite initiatives, and a meeting point to define commitments for the future. The opening session, with the title "From besieged Gaza to colonized Jerusalem: Crimes of Israeli wars", will present the context of the current situation.

On the first day, four thematic areas will be presented and debated in a series of four panels that are open to the public. The second day, a series of related thematic workshops will focus on producing practical action plans for solidarity work based on the discussions the day before and the previous work done by each of the participants.

2.- Participants

All Basque, Spanish and European organizations working for solidarity with Palestine are invited to participate in "The Bilbao Initiative". In order to ensure a real working space, they should endorse the document of reference that sets up the framework for the Civil Society Assembly. Contact: mewando@mewando.org

3.- The Plan of Action

To work on a final declaration indicating the plan of action that will be the outcome of "The Bilbao Initiative", a steering Committee was approved in the first meeting between PNGO-ITTIJAH-AIC and MEWANDO. This steering Committee will be in charge of drafting the final declaration and presenting it as the outcome of the conference.

