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Loles Oliván

Arab Cause Solidarity Committee (ACSC) and Spanish Campaign Against the Occupation and for the Sovereignty of Iraq (SCOSI)

I would like to thank the organizers of this Second Cairo Conference for inviting our organization to take part in this initiative.

I would like to make a synthesis on 2 questions:

1.- Support of Palestine, Iraqi and Arab Resistance

The ACSC reiterates the need and urgency of recuperate the broad International Movement Against the War and to recuperate in support of the Iraqi and Palestine resistance.

Resistance is a legitimate right of occupied and oppressed peoples. We reject and combat against the US, Zionist and European Union speeches on ‘terrorism’ as much as we resist the ‘Global War against terrorism’ launches by US regime, Israel and other shameful European governments like the one of Aznar in the Spanish State.

I want to mention that despite the Spanish public opinion opposed in 98% to the War against Iraq and that more that 76% opposes now to the neocolonial occupation of this Arab country, Aznar’s Government has sent the Spanish army as well as the Spanish intelligence services to work under the orders of US occupation forces and the Pentagon.

2.- Some comments on the incidence of the Arab issues in the frame work of the International Movement and specially related to the last European Social Forum held in Paris last month:

The parcelling of the Arab regional context.

Although progress has been made in affirming the direct relation between the occupations of Palestine and Iraq, as well as the necessity of combating them in coordination, the ACSC continues to express concern over the fact that the Palestinian cause as well as the Iraqi are in many instances being disconnected from their Arab regional context. Regarding this, it is significant that the European Social Forum’s (ESF) Final Document does not contain any reference at all to this Arab regional context, which in essence constitutes the wider scenario in which this process of military interventionism is being played out, in association with the expansion of globalized capitalism.

While in the ESF debates it was recognized that military occupation represents the new neo-colonial structure which the US intends to impose on Iraq, associated with the insertion of the country and its resources into the sphere of the global capitalist economy, it was once again forgotten that the neo-liberal model which the US intends to impose by military force in Iraq is the same which is also being imposed, through powerful economic pressures and political impositions (exemplified in the US initiative known as the ‘Middle East Free Trade Association’) on submissive Arab political regimes whose *legitimacy* is subject exclusively to their acceptance of US dictates for the remodelling of the entire Arab region, and not to the will and democratic rights of the populations they claim to represent.

In equal measure, opposition to the Israeli occupation has been progressively disconnected from its wider Arab regional aspect, in not touching upon the close link which exists between the goal of territorial and demographic control over all of Palestine and regional Zionist objectives, which form part of the strategy for the implantation of Israeli hegemony throughout the entire area.

Absent: the issue of Arab-Israeli “normalization”

The ESF continues to ignore the necessity of tackling a central issue in the fight against capitalist globalization in the Arab region (and not only in Iraq and Palestine); one issue which has been the subject of renewed demand by widespread sectors of Arab society—from Morocco to Bahrain, and including Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon and some of the Gulf states— since 1991: that of rejecting US-imposed Arab-Israeli *normalization* by progressively establishing diplomatic, political, economic, cultural and security-based relations between the Israel and the Arab regimes, without having brought about the return of those Arab territories occupied by Israel and without the latter having renounced the regressive, racist ideology upon which the colonial State of Israel is founded: Zionism.

Normalization constitutes an essential tool for assuring the regional economic hegemony of Israel (now that its military counterpart has been consolidated through the dismantling of the Iraqi state by invasion and occupation, and thanks to the permanent military support of the US to Israeli governments) and is wreaking disastrous consequences in the Arab states—as in the case of Jordan, Egypt, Mauritania, etc— given that the insertion of Israel in the Arab economies is directly linked to the application of unpopular economic and financial reforms. These reforms, administered through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank but inspired by Washington, not only force Arab states to execute policies for the privatisation of public sectors and in favour of foreign economic interventionism (thereby increasing economic dependency and poverty), but also placing as direct beneficiary of such policies, in economic as well as strategic terms, the state of Israel: a state which continues to illegally occupy Arab territories in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria; which has radicalised its use of military force under the auspices of Bush’s “global war on terrorism” to bring down the Intifada and the National Palestinian Movement; and which is moreover already actively intervening, both economically and in military and security terms in occupied Iraq.

Palestine: human rights and occupation versus national rights and resistance

Without any doubt the Palestinian cause has become, as has been seen in the ESF, a unique reference point for the struggle of international progressive movements in favouring popular self-determination. The dimension of military brutality and the unchecked violations perpetrated by Israel against the whole of the Palestinian population in the 1967 Occupied Territories (OT), particularly during the past three years of the Intifada, are provoking a reaction within the international solidarity movement, giving rise to specific campaigns which have contributed to extending within broad sectors of Europe and the US the knowledge of what is really happening in the OT’s and to the articulation of responses to the challenges facing the Palestinian solidarity movement.

However, in Europe and in the ESF, two are the axes that underlie the issue of solidarity with Palestine: the defence of human rights for the Palestinian people and the condemnation of the military occupation of the OT’s. Seen through this framework of solidarity, the drama in which Israel’s Zionist policies (now represented by the government of Sharon) have mired the Palestinian people unquestionably obliges the demand that rights basic and fundamental to human life be respected, the same rights which the Israeli army violates systematically in Palestine. Along with this, Israel’s policy of repression toward the Intifada has exacerbated the collective punishment inflicted in practices such as the military attacks on the civilian population, the reoccupation of autonomous zones, the closing of roads and territories, the curfews, the demolition of dwellings, the selective assassinations and the confiscation of land, all of which constitute a contemptible, long-standing violation of fundamental human rights which goes hand in hand with the violation of rights as basic as those of freedom of movement, education, health care and housing. For all of these reasons, and in opposition to the Israeli military occupation—the cause of the human drama which has unfolded in Palestine— both the defence of the Palestinian people’s human rights and the condemnation of the occupation continue to be the focus of the general debate on Palestine in the ESF.

Without questioning in the slightest the necessary stance taken by the ESF, reflection should also be given to the consequences which, in the context of international solidarity, the defence of human rights in

Palestine and the denunciation of the military occupation may have for that other cause which has served as the backbone of the Palestinian struggle and the National Liberation Movement throughout its history: that of legitimate Palestinian national rights, which for the Palestinian people themselves continue to be the foundation of their cause and should provide the basic, indispensable political reference for the creation of an international Palestinian solidarity movement committed with the Palestinian popular, national, progressive and democratic goals.

In the rush to join together the greatest possible number of the diverse strengths, tendencies and sensibilities which exist within the ESF, and in the context of extreme hostility imposed by US and Israeli policy against Palestine, the ACSC sees with deep concern the progressively weakening of this national vindication which justifies, along with the support for human rights in Palestine and the condemnation of the Israeli occupation, the endorsement in plain terms of the Palestinian cause and its legitimate resistance movement, as much in the collective resolve of the civilian population not to cooperate with the occupation as in the armed resistance against Israeli military objectives and settlements. As the disproportionate violence perpetrated by Israel against Palestine —State terrorism in the truest sense— cannot in any way be compared to the acts of legitimate Palestinian armed resistance, and as the drama constituted by the phenomenon of suicide bombers which has mushroomed in Israel cannot be disassociated from the inequality of conditions which exists between the struggle of an occupied population and the power which occupies it, the ESF must be clear in rejecting the argument extending within its ranks by the so called ‘pacifism’ of the Israeli Zionist ‘left’, and by a good portion of the official European left, that the violence affects “both populations equally”.

The Zionist left and Israeli ‘pacifism’ in the ESF

Regarding the active participation in the ESF of the so called ‘leftists’ and ‘pacifists’ of Israel, two considerations have barely been taken into account in ESF debates: first, that in their arguments the Israeli pacifist left —whose presence is incomparably more influential than that of progressive movements from the Arab world, which are given little recognition in the ESF— oppose the occupation of the OT’s from a point of view which goes little beyond the humanitarian commitment —to the human rights of the Palestinian people— and from a position which try to exploit the ‘anti-capitalist struggle’ in Israel to their own favour.

Thus, the argument is heard from the ‘leftists’ Israelis organizations presented in the ESF that the occupation must be ended because it has very negative repercussions in the Israeli economy through its prioritization of a permanent war economy, to the detriment of social development and causing an increase in exclusion, unemployment and inequality.

Using a common speech of the anticapitalists movements, the Israeli left can not pretend to be consider neither leftists not anticapitalists while it does not renounces, denounces and fights against Zionism and its colonial and racist project. And the support they are receiving from large sectors of the leftists ESF will be against the benefit of the Palestinian national cause as well as the whole Arab causes.

The so called Israeli left similarly does not denounce the hegemonic insertion of the State of Israel into the Arab region —the essence of Israeli Zionist goals— nor the implementing of regional *normalization* as a vehicle for capitalist globalization in the Middle East. As internationalists and progresists, we reject this Zionist Leftists of the State of Israel that neither questions nor denounces that disastrous fundamental component which nurtures the idiosyncrasy of Israel: Zionism. If internationalism is an essential pillar of leftist and progressive movements throughout the world, it follows that the Israeli left should denounce and combat these Zionist goals in the regional framework of the Arab Middle East.

Iraq: an end to the occupation

Despite the unanimous feeling in the ESF in opposition to maintaining the military occupation of Iraq, the creation of the Final Document as regards this issue has suffered the negative effects of the more moderate sectors of the ESF organization: although the majority of the document preparation assembly agreed that the text should call for the “immediate withdrawal of troops” and “end to the occupation of Iraq”, after a prolonged debate this wording had to be modified to: “withdrawal of troops” and “immediate end to the occupation”, opening the way to a formula (little debated in the various plenary sessions, at least those attended by the ACSC and the SCOSI) whereby US occupation troops may be progressively replaced by

United Nations troops as a preliminary step to restoring the country's sovereignty.

Final considerations

At least as far as it deals with the Palestinian and Iraqi issues, the content of the ESF's Final Document reflects more the moderate, social-democratic line represented in certain sectors of the Forum than it does the more progressive groups and organizations of the international left committed to making the World Social Forum a truly functional vehicle of expression and action for international transformation. The Final Document supports the mobilization against the occupation of Iraq and Palestine being organized by the US Coalition ANSWER for 20 March, 2004, the first anniversary of the start of the invasion.

With respect to Arab issues, the urgent necessity to encourage a greater degree of participation and a more central role in the WSF for progressive Arab organizations should be taken under consideration for two reasons:

1) that, although official US and European policy fights against any notion of cohesion and unity in an area which is in fact linked geographically, demographically, politically, economically, socially and culturally, the Arab region as whole has become one-select scenario for intense US interventionism and neo-liberal capitalism. In this sense, viewing the military aggression and occupation of Iraq and Palestine apart from this other more sophisticated campaign to spread capitalist globalization throughout the entire Arab region—in all of its political, economic, cultural and ideological facets—contributes to the hegemonic discourse of division and fragmentation officially favoured by the US and Europe for an Arab world characterised by permanent weakness, dependence and submission.

2) that, as the struggle against imperialism is also being addressed from within the Arab world, it is necessary to strengthen dialogue with the progressive Arab sectors, making known and supporting in the international arena their battle against capitalist globalization and interventionism, which is none other than the struggle against the process of *normalizing* Israel within the Arab context; the *normalization*, essentially economic but also political, strategic and ideological, which Israel and the US are attempting to impose (with the European Union in a subsidiary role) on various illegitimate political regimes, contrary to the aspirations and interests of the Arab people. **The Arab struggle against normalization is the political principle which forms the axis of combat against capitalist globalization in the Arab world and should be thus a principle and an element indispensable to the agenda of international solidarity that the WSF is trying to adopt.**

The recent decision to delay the organization of the Mediterranean Social Forum (which proposes to include, along with organizations from Israel, Turkey, Malta and the Baltic states, organizations from the Mediterranean Arab countries as well) due to “political conditions not being right”, opens debate on a central question in regard to Arab organizations: who are they and which of them should represent the Arab world in the creation and configuration of a Mediterranean Social Forum?

The lack of an strong Arab presence in the World Social Forum (WSF) is attributed to the absence of a tradition of association among Arab countries, although hardly anyone wishes to examine this question in depth; it would necessarily mean recognizing that the European left has little knowledge of the Arab socio-political world and that, **if it were willing to be undertaken, such a dialogue with progressive Arabs would involve contact with sectors much more radical than certain European leftists and the normalised Israeli leftists are ready to accept**, for instance, casting doubt on the very validity of the initiative of a Mediterranean Social Forum, in light of the urgency for the creation of an Arab Social Forum. The question which should be asked with respect to the WSF is: why is there no Arab Social Forum in the WSF?, Where might progressive Arab sectors outside the Mediterranean region—be they Iraqi, Yemeni, Jordan, Sudanese, Somali, Mauritanian or from the Gulf states—coordinate their activities, if not in an Arab Social Forum along with the rest of the Arab world?. Should it not be the commitment of the WSF to identify and acknowledge these Arab progressive organizations and favouring them, as Arabs as much as progressists, to define, construct, coordinate and finance by their own their own Arab Social Forum in which they may articulate and express their political, and national aspirations and find a platform for making these known to the international movement?

We reiterate our support to Iraqi, Palestine and Arab Resistance. It is our obligation and responsibility as internationalists and anti-imperialists to support without reservations the resistance in Iraq and Palestine. The Palestinian and Iraqi people and their fight is our fight; their cause is our cause since their aspirations of freedom, independence, popular sovereignty, democracy and social justice applies as well for all of us and dignifies all peoples all over the world.

With Iraq, with Palestine, in support of the Iraqi, Palestine and Arab resistance

Hatta an-Nasr

Hasta la Victoria, siempre