

November 28, 2008

Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann  
President, General Assembly  
United Nations



Canada Europe India Israel Latin America  
Morocco United Kingdom United States

Excellency,

At the 57<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting on the Question of Palestine you have broken a debilitating taboo that has long bedeviled the international response to the dire and fast deteriorating humanitarian and political conditions of Palestinians.

You have described Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as similar to those of the defunct apartheid regime in South Africa. You have urged the U.N. to use the term 'apartheid' without fear. And you have drawn a conclusion for action:

Today, perhaps we in the United Nations should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society, who are calling for a similar non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations.

We, The International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for these timely pronouncements.

The regime in Israel shares many similarities with apartheid-era South Africa. In some respects, Israel's policies are worse and potentially more dangerous than apartheid South Africa ever was. This has been recognized by journalists, scholars, and prominent South Africans, including President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The situation in Gaza is catastrophic and leaves no time for understatement. We are heartened by your straightforward language.

Given Israel's long history of ignoring U.N. resolutions and world public opinion, only a civil society led campaign of boycott, divestments and sanctions could force Israel's leaders to choose compromise over belligerence. U.N. bodies and institutions could play an important role in moving this campaign towards greater effectiveness. This is a special obligation of the U.N., whose early decisions on Palestine have been instrumental in enabling the establishment of apartheid in Palestine and whose track record on holding Israel to account for its persistent violations of UN resolutions has been discouraging.

We urge that your message be heeded and that it serve to reinvigorate the international defense of peace and human rights. We also welcome the growing assertiveness and active involvement of Third World countries such as Nicaragua in providing such defense—particularly countries whose own histories of liberation inform the growing sympathy for the Palestinian people and a better understanding of the roots of oppression in Palestine.

We also take this opportunity to note that the imposition of apartheid is not limited to within the Occupied Palestinian Territories but is also present in abundance in the areas defined as Israel by the 1949 armistice lines, and it is manifested in the denial of the Palestinian refugees' right of return. Palestinian residents of the Galilee and the Negev are subject to campaigns of 'development' that seeks to establish Jewish-only housing and settlements while destroying Palestinian communities and uprooting them. These 'development' campaigns bear strong similarities to the settlement projects

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in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Discrimination against Palestinians in all aspects of life is entrenched, including both police violence and sporadic vigilante violence as happened recently in Akka. Israel has ratified the 1965 international treaty against racial discrimination, yet racist incidents are increasing, and racist discrimination by the State is pervasive.

We urge the U.N. to engage the problem of Israeli apartheid in a comprehensive manner that is not restricted to U.N. resolutions regarding borders (181 and 242) and international law regarding belligerent occupation, but that includes the totality of relevant U.N. resolutions and international conventions, including resolution 191 affirming the rights of the refugees to return, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 2007 Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People, the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the 1951 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and as mentioned in your address, the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.

The comprehensive resolution of this problem is first and foremost one that must be sought to ensure the safety and rights of the Palestinian people. However, we believe that the violence of the State of Israel's apartheid and occupation endangers all people, including Jews, in the region and beyond. A just peace can only be secured if Israel first ends its apartheid regime and occupation of Palestine, but a lasting peace will require true equality, a redistribution of land and resources, and reconciliation for the damages done. This must include a collective process in which the Jewish Israeli society understands the oppression in which they are implicated and in which they have participated. There lies the only realistic hope Jewish people in the Middle East have for a future of freedom and peace. In Nelson Mandela's visionary words:

The responses made by South Africa to human rights abuses emanating from the removal policies and apartheid policies respectively, shed light on what Israeli society must necessarily go through before one can speak of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and an end to its apartheid policies.

As a body that seeks to represent the world, the U.N. has an important role in conveying to Jewish Israelis both the urgency and the benefits of joining the global consensus against apartheid. We thank you for your honesty and courage in speaking so that they may also hear.

You have already been accused of anti-Semitism and unfortunately such accusations will continue to be made against you by apartheid apologists. We condemn categorically those who hurl these accusations, accusations that are not only baseless and malicious, but disrespectful to the memory of the millions of Jews who were victims of real anti-Semitism. We abhor the use of that memory to justify crimes and to silence calls for compassion and humanity. We understand your actions rather as honoring the history of Jewish persecution and an expression of concern for all those living in the State of Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and the broader region.

We look forward to continuing our work in support of boycott, divestment and sanctions and hope that a reinvigorated U.N. participation in this campaign shortens the road to Palestinian liberation and the end of apartheid in Israel.

With the assurance of our highest respect,  
International Jewish anti-Zionist Network