

Just Like Israelis, Palestinians Deserve Justice

I believe it is possible to support the human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians. I don't think in order to be a Zionist or in order to support Israel, you have to be against the rights of Palestinians.

And I don't think that if you appreciate Palestinian human rights, you have to condemn the state of Israel and Zionism. It is completely possible to support and advocate for human rights on both sides of the track.

In fact, there is really nobody more critical of the Israeli government than Israelis. We have a very, very intense civil debate; newspapers and journalists aggressively criticize our government.

My organization, the Jerusalem Institute for Justice, has invested the past nine years in actually calling the Israeli government to account on issues of human rights, civil rights, freedom of religion and social justice. We're calling the Israeli government to stand on the very standards and laws that it created.

Our founding fathers determined we would be a Jewish and a democratic state and that there would be equality for all the citizens within our borders. We challenge the Israeli government on many of these issues.

We have noticed that because Israel has a high standard of democracy and because we have the rule of law and independent courts that are not ashamed to criticize and make decisions against our government, there is an avenue where our voice will be heard.

Because of that, most advocacy on behalf of Palestinian human

rights is directed only against the Israeli government, which is there to listen when someone speaks out. And because of that, many of the human rights organizations in the international community working in the Middle East have basically given a *carte blanche* to the Palestinian Authority to abuse the human rights of the Palestinian people.

There is very, very little criticism coming against the behavior of the Palestinian Authority. Why? No one is there to listen.

I think all of us should be interested in having a stable Middle East; that is beyond question. But beyond just wanting stability in the Middle East, we should care about issues affecting the Palestinian Authority—because your tax money is currently funding much of its activities.

A Lot of Money

The Palestinian Authority receives, on average, around €500 million (\$650 million) per year from the European Union. That amount is more or less matched by the United States. Also, Canada and Japan are generous donors. We're talking about more than €1 billion per year coming into the coffers of the Palestinian Authority. That is your tax money. You should be concerned how it is being spent.

In fact, over the last 19 years, from the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1994 until today, the Palestinians have received more than 25 times more aid per capita than the amount of money donated from the United States to Europe under the Marshall Plan after World War II.

The Marshall Plan paid for the complete reconstruction and rehabilitation of the European economy. Let me put this in simple terms: With the monies donated to the Palestinian Authority over the last 19 years, we could have reconstructed the European economy 25 times!

Where Does the Money Go?

What has happened to this money? Where has all the money gone? And why are Palestinians still living in abject poverty throughout the Middle East?

I'll tell you that much of the funds have been siphoned off to the private bank accounts of the Palestinian leaders. Other funds have been used to stockpile weapons, to build the biggest police force per capita of any nation in the world and to support education that diametrically opposes Western principles and values and supports racism, anti-Semitism and hatred. This is how your money has been used.

According to Arabic newspaper reports, Mahmoud Abbas, the current president of the Palestinian Authority, receives a salary of €1 million per month!

This is more than 30 times the salary of President Barack Obama and 90 times the salary of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. According to Arabic bloggers, Mahmoud Abbas is estimated to be worth €100 million personally; that's his personal net worth. He is also relatively young, so probably by the time he reaches the age of his predecessor, Yasser Arafat, when he passes away, he might be worth more. In Arafat's own private bank accounts, accountants found investments of more than €1.3 billion (\$1.7 billion) upon his death.

So what we have happening right now in the Palestinian Authority is that all this massive aid coming from Europe and the United States is going to make a few individual leaders at the top of the system rich, but it is not filtering down to actually build the proper institutions within the Palestinian Authority.

What Rule of Law?

Over the last year, the Palestinian Authority has made more

than 1,700 arbitrary arrests that have been reported by international human rights organizations. Arbitrary arrests, degrading treatment, torture, executions without trial. Just three weeks ago, for instance, there was a 21-year-old man named Anas Awwad who received a one-and-a-half-year prison sentence for posting a joke about Mahmoud Abbas on his Facebook page.

This is very troubling to me. It is troubling to me because I live and work in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is only a few kilometers from Nablus. I live in Israeli society, where we have freedom of religion, freedom of expression, human rights, civil rights and a very active media. I can write whatever I want on my blog about the prime minister without any fear of repercussion.

This is why I am so passionate about calling upon the international community to get engaged in this issue, to start monitoring the funds going into this government and demanding human rights reforms. If anyone in the world can demand human rights reforms of the Palestinians, it is the Western democracies that are sending all this money.

A State of Their Own?

I personally believe that the right for the Palestinians to have a state should be based upon their ability to properly govern their own people. It should be based upon their ability to uphold democracy, the rule of law, human rights and individual freedoms. If their right to a state is only based upon some historical claim to land, creating a state today will only create more problems and actually complicate life and make it worse—not only for the Israelis, but also for the Palestinians.

So this process of starting to review and challenge the human rights abuses in the Palestinian Authority is a very important step to finding a solution to our region. People are more

important than the land, and if you put land above the people, you'll get a graveyard. So it is critical that we use human rights as our compass, in order to reach an equitable solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

*Attorney **Calev Myers** is an Israeli human rights activist for both Jews and Arabs. This article is an excerpt from a fascinating yet critically important speech he recently gave at the University of Helsinki in Finland.*

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