



**SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE:
KING'S CALL TO CONSCIENCE**

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Part 1. When Dr. Martin Luther King gave his historic speech regarding the moral need to break his silence in criticism of America's unjust war against the people of Vietnam, he warned us against the betrayal of silence. For silence in the face of injustice, especially of such a brutal kind as unjust war, is a betrayal of the victims, of our highest values, and ultimately of ourselves and of others who look to us to speak truth, do justice and act righteously in the world. He tells us in his call to conscience "we are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers (and sisters)". Moreover, he says that we must question and oppose "those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight".

Nowhere is his call to conscience more applicable than to this time which calls us to stand in solidarity with the people of occupied Palestine who have endured in the last month a most devastating, unjust and indefensible war of invasion by the Israeli armed forces under the guise of self-defense and with the complicity and support of the American government. Thus, if we are silent and passive now, we become complicit in this aggression and devastation.

The month-long morally monstrous slaughter of the people of Palestine in Gaza—children, women, the elderly, ill and hospitalized, and other persons of all kinds—by Israel cannot be called an act of "self-defense" by any humane, moral or rational measure. Surely, the strange claim of "self-defense" loses its intended meaning among the graphic images of broken and

bloodied bodies and severed heads and limbs of unarmed and innocent civilians, scattered in the streets, and a man carrying his son's shredded body in a plastic bag, the victim of Israeli flechette bombs, anti-personnel bombs packed with steel darts that strip the flesh and cut the body to pieces, and of family members and neighbors killed by more bombs and sniper fire as they dig fervently to rescue and retrieve those trapped under mountains of rubble.

The UN called the Israeli attacks on its centers for those fleeing the indiscriminate bombing and shelling "shameful" and a "moral outrage and crime"; the U.S., even while supporting and resupplying Israel, called its killing of children, women and others at the UN centers "appalling", "disgraceful", "unacceptable and indefensible under any circumstance". And around the world, words such as "butchery", "massacre", "carnage", "war crimes", and "crimes against humanity" were used to describe this massive destruction of the lives and savage disabling of the Palestinian people, with 1800 plus (at least 80% civilians) killed, 10,000 plus wounded, 450,000 made homeless, whole families wiped out at once, and untold numbers of children and others traumatized and in need of psychological and social support for an undetermined period of time. Indeed, many Jews and Jewish allies also saw this aggression as morally indefensible, in contradiction to the best of Jewish values and contributive to the creation of negative views of Israel and Jews.

Clearly, there is no "self-defense" dimension to razing to the ground whole communities such as Shejaiya, Khuzaa, Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahia, and Zanaa; refusing to allow emergency aid personnel to collect the

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wounded and dead; or bombing fishing boats and farming sites, market places and mosques, homes, hospitals, clinics, media facilities, cultural and educational institutions, water, power and sanitation services, and UN shelters of sanctuary and service. This was destruction, not only of the lives of the Palestinian people at these places, but also of their means of living a life of dignity and decency, safe and secure in their own land and homes, and able to gather together in community spaces without fear of being killed and terrorized by what some Israeli military and political leaders call a "regular mowing the grass".

If we are to truly see and oppose such unconscionable atrocities, we must work our way thru a maze of myths and misrepresentations formulated and fostered by Israel and its American ally and supporters. This begins with recognizing that the fundamental problem is not the Palestinian people, but Israel's occupation of Palestine; its denial of the right of the Palestinian people to exist as a political and cultural community rooted in the land and to have their own independent and sovereign state with security from invasion and intervention of any kind. Israel asks of the Palestinian people what it does not concede itself and thus violates the principle of reciprocal recognition and respect.

Indeed, it is part of the doctrine of parties in the Israeli government (i.e., Likud) that Palestine will never exist as a state. And there are calls for not only regularly "mowing the grass", but also ethnic cleansing and total annihilation of Palestinians from government officials (Jewish Home Party). These views are held by some Israeli citizens who chanted at rallies during the invasion that "There is no school tomorrow;

there are no children left in Gaza. Gaza is a cemetery". And they are expressed by citizens of a border Israeli town, Sderot, mounting a hilltop with chairs, sofas and popcorn to watch and cheer the bombing of Palestine. It is important to remember these things when blanket claims are made about Palestinians' mentality, motives and moral status as contrasted to those of Israelis.

The fundamental fact of Palestinian life, then, is the occupation by Israel, a brutal wide-ranging form of oppression, augmented by the siege of Gaza turned into the imprisonment of a whole people: army and police presence; continued violence, raids, seizures, searches and systematic assassinations; political imprisonment; torture and beatings; endless humiliating check points and an apartheid/separation wall; aggressive and death-dealing settlers; Jewish-only roads; houses, farms and orchards bulldozed; monies withheld; water, land and resources appropriated; calories counted and diet determined for food delivery allowance and resultant malnutrition; educational and cultural institutions closed, attacked and destroyed; families divided by lines drawn by the occupier; and passes and practices reminiscent of apartheid South Africa as Archbishop Desmond Tutu has observed.

Thus, to skip this violent and vicious reality and to ask what would Americans do if rockets were shot at this country prejudices and perverts the question. For the real question is what would America or Israel itself do, if it were occupied and oppressed? Would they resist and seek liberation or submit to the oppressor? We need not pretend to ponder the answer to this, for history already yields the answer.

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