

Opening Remarks

Title: Opening Remarks by Rima Khalaf to 1st Global Conference on Dimensions, Repercussions of Israeli Apartheid And the Means to Combat it

By Dr. Rima Khalaf

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His Eminence, Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem,

Honorable guests,

I thank our partners, the Union of NGOs of the Islamic World, and the Republic of Turkey for hosting our conference in Istanbul. And I thank you all, not only for being with us today, but for your relentless efforts to bring justice to the Palestinian people.

This is a difficult period in time for our region. Not because of a new calamity, but rather, because of the vicious collusion of two old ones: despotism and colonialism. It is a time where we see domestic tyranny inviting foreign occupation, where Israeli crimes are supported by some Arab leaders, and where international interventions are leaving behind devastating regional catastrophes. They have all come together to sustain this cycle of injustice, at the core of which lies the Israeli Apartheid Regime.

The Israeli Apartheid Regime is an injustice that was given time, resources, and protection for decades, until it became deeply entrenched and institutionalized. Israel is now exploiting the rise of far-right ideologies that share its core values of racism, intolerance, and complete

disregard for international law, to gain international recognition of the right to exist as an apartheid state — in reality and in practice, if not in name.

The Apartheid Regime imposed by Israel has not spared a single Palestinian.

All Palestinian citizens of Israel are subject to institutionalized discrimination. Israel is the only country in the world to confer citizenship based on inherited religion. And unlike all other constitutions, Israel's basic laws do not recognize equality as a governing principle, rather they allow for discrimination based on religion and ethnic origin.

Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank are governed by oppressive military orders that apply exclusively to them, and not to Jewish settlers who moved to the occupied Territory in violation of international law. These military orders govern every aspect of Palestinian lives; from traveling between villages, to digging water wells, to harvesting olives, to visiting relatives, to seeking treatment at a hospital, to enrolling a child in school.

In Gaza, under a suffocating siege, Israel's tyranny extends to the sea and sky, which are closed to Palestinians, and open to the Israeli navy and air forces, and to the destruction and war crimes they bring upon innocent Palestinian civilians.

Palestinian refugees are not allowed to go back to their homes and land because of their religion; had it not been for their religion, they wouldn't have been uprooted in the first place.

Dear friends,

International law obliges us to fight against, and punish, the crime of apartheid wherever it occurs. Our conscience, not just the law, compels us to combat Israeli Apartheid not only to restore rights and justice in Palestine, but also to secure a peaceful future for humanity at large.

I would like you to take a minute to imagine with me the state of our world if all countries followed Israel's suit. If a state can be based on inherited religion or ethnic origin, then it would be legitimate to establish a state exclusively for Muslims, a state for Catholics, and a state for Protestants, Hindus, and Buddhists, or a state for Caucasians, or for only the blue-eyed among them. It would also be legitimate for these states to engage in ethnic cleansing to safeguard

their racial or ethnic purity. If all it took for a person to become a national of a given state is to belong to a certain religion or ethnicity, then borders across the globe would be redrawn by force and fire. You can only imagine the future brought about by such a global war.

Those who read history do not need to resort to imagination — memory will suffice. A century ago, scientists developed theories on racial hierarchies. Politicians wholeheartedly embraced these theories, disenfranchising peoples in Africa, Asia, and the indigenous populations of the new world, and pillaging their resources, under the pretext that they were entrusted by God and history to spread civilization among the inferior. In Europe, hateful antisemitism spread, killing millions of innocent Jews only because they were Jews. The result of all this was two devastating World Wars that killed tens of millions and brought whole nations to the brink of extinction. This is what racism does to the land and its inhabitants.

Nations of the world learned their lesson the hard way. They collectively established moral codes and legal systems to save us from falling again. They ratified treaties that criminalized the acquisition of land by force. They criminalized discrimination between people based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin. They determined “that any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust, and dangerous”. And they determined that apartheid is a crime against humanity that all nations of the world must combat wherever it occurs.

Israel does not want to abide by these universal moral norms and legal systems, rather it wants the world to accept and legitimize its dispossession and oppression of non-Jews in the territories it controls. Making an exception for Israel to do this will engulf our world in countless religious and ethnic wars. An exception, if not fought against, will become the new norm after all.

Today the decision is ours. Do we combat Israeli Apartheid, and protect the world from the recurrence of horrendous acts of cruelty that almost eliminated entire nations in the past? Or do we close our eyes to this injustice, only to open them after a short period of time to a tragedy of epic proportions?

Here I'd like to thank two towering scholars: Richard Falk and Virginia Tilly, who prepared the first UN report determining that Israel has established an apartheid regime to maintain its control over the Palestinian people. The ESCWA report has also helped expose three key fallacies that Israel and its supporters have promoted over the past half century.

The first of these fallacies is that the tribulations of the Palestinian people started in 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The suffering, in fact, began a century beforehand, when Palestine was targeted by a settler colonialist project that sought to uproot the Palestinian people from their land and replace them with another. The suffering intensified when the newly created state of Israel established an apartheid regime to dominate and dispossess its Palestinian citizens. And the suffering engulfed even more people in 1967, when Israel occupied the rest of Mandate Palestine, and made every Palestinian, irrespective of his or her location, subject to its Apartheid Regime.

The second fallacy pertains to the nature of the crime committed by Israel, which is often portrayed as merely non-compliance with international resolutions, requiring no more than a reprimand by the international community. The report showed that the crime perpetrated by Israel is far more dire; it showed that Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid — a crime against humanity. All countries of the world have a legal obligation to work, individually and collectively, to punish instances of apartheid, and to bring apartheid regimes to an end.

The third and last fallacy brought to light by the report concerns the nature of a just solution to the conflict. The international community has converged around ending the occupation that began in 1967 through a two-state solution, as the optimum outcome. The report proved that such a solution is neither just, nor can it bring permanent peace. Neither will human suffering end, nor will the requirements of international law be met until all people enjoy full equality, and the Israeli Apartheid Regime that Israel has imposed on all Palestinians, is brought to an end.

Since the publication of the ESCWA report, Israel has enacted a number of laws to consolidate its regime of racial segregation, the most important of which being the Jewish Nation State Law, enacted in 2018, which further entrenches discrimination as a cornerstone of Israel's legal

system. Israeli institutions are now legally obliged to discriminate against Palestinians to comply with a Basic Law that renders discrimination a constitutional principle, and racial segregation a national value.

In that same year, the USA decided to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Only days ago, the US Secretary of State asserted that Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories are "not, per se, inconsistent with international law". These two decisions reveal either ignorance of international law, or a decision by the world's strongest state to go against it, a development that could pose serious risks to global peace and security. And although these two decisions do not initiate a new right for Israel, nor do they erode Palestinian rights as embedded in international law, they will still have an impact on the feasibility of the different alternatives to bring the conflict to an end.

These two decisions, in addition to the new racist laws enacted by Israel, will require a serious review of the Palestinian strategy for restoring Palestinian rights: should this strategy continue to focus on ending the occupation within the framework of a two-state solution, should it start the struggle to dismantle the Israeli Apartheid Regime, should it pursue both in parallel?

This conference is designed to allow us to discuss these questions. I hope that our deliberations will go beyond diagnosis to the role that we, as individuals, activists, jurists, intellectuals, and civil society organizations, can play to dismantle the Israeli Apartheid Regime. Here, there is a lot to learn from the pivotal role that civil society organizations played in bringing down the apartheid regime in South Africa. It is my hope that our conference will provide the groundwork towards establishing a Global Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid, where members can coordinate their activities to bring this century-long injustice to an end.

Lastly, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I express our unyielding solidarity with the Palestinian people, who are all subject to Israel's Apartheid Regime. To them, we say that this injustice will sooner or later come to an end, because there is no place in this world for a system that discriminates against people on the basis of religion and ethnic origin; a system that believes in the superiority of one ethnic group over others. We promise to make every possible effort to make this happen sooner than later. I

would also like to say to Arab leaders who have found an ally and friend in Israel, against their own people, that they are committing a grave mistake and hurting themselves, their own people, and the people of Palestine. One cannot deal with the Israeli Apartheid Regime by forming alliances with it, and by offering Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as tokens of friendship. The only way to deal with the Israeli Apartheid Regime, just like with any other racist regime, is by boycotting it, punishing it, and making every effort to dismantle it. This is a regime that will fall, and when it does, so will all parties that circulated in its orbit.

To the Palestinian people I say, you are not alone – we are with you. As we look into the eyes of your men, women and children, who bravely march toward their freedom, now besieged by laws, barbed wires, nuclear weapons and phosphorous missiles, we are inspired, and we know that justice can, and will, prevail.