

UNION POLICY (EMERGENCY GENERAL MEETING - (11.02.09))

GAZA CRISIS

THIS UNION NOTES

1. Over the three weeks following December 27th the Israeli army and airforce killed over 1,300 Palestinians, including over 400 children, and injured more than 4,000 in a series of brutal attacks on the besieged population of Gaza. In the same period 14 Israelis were killed, 3 of which were civilians who died as a result of rocket attacks.
2. Israel attacked Gaza from the air, sea and land, targeting the main UN compound in which 700 civilians were sheltering (As reported by Reuters on the 15/01/2009). A hospital and three schools belonging to the UN were also bombarded. In one incident, thirty civilians were killed after Israeli troops gathered them into one house to shelter and subsequently proceeded to shell it, killing all those inside (As reported in the Washington Times on the 10/01/2009). All in all, three hospitals were attacked, the main university in Gaza was almost completely destroyed as were hundreds of civilian homes, schools, health clinics, police stations and government buildings. Much of Gaza's infrastructure, electricity plants, water systems, roads and telecommunications were also severely damaged, deepening the already desperate humanitarian crisis (As reported by Human Rights Watch on the 13/01/2009)
3. During the onslaught into Gaza, Israel used white phosphorus illegally. (As reported by Amnesty International on the 19/01/2009, and The Times on the 24/01/2009)
4. Hamas was democratically elected on 25th January 2006 and that this election was accepted as being free and fair by the American administration of the day. (See White House Press Conference, January 26th 2006).
5. This latest Israeli atrocity comes after 18 months of the Israeli siege and blockade of Gaza, which has crippled the Gazan economy and caused starvation and malnourishment throughout Gaza. The Governments of Israel, the United States, and the EU have blockaded the Gaza Strip, refusing to allow food, fuel, and medical supplies into Gaza. The Israeli imposed blockade has resulted in a situation where over 750,000 people in Gaza are reliant upon food aid, over 80% of the population face unemployment, and hospitals have been forced to operate below minimum requirements. Amnesty International has condemned the blockade as a form of collective punishment, noting that it is a violation of the Geneva Convention and a war crime.
6. Since November 2008, Israel prevented foreign journalists from entering Gaza. This has prevented outside reporting of the situation.
7. Criticism of the State of Israel is not ant-Semitic in and of itself.
8. Being democratically elected does not excuse military action in and of itself.
9. 2008 marked the 60th anniversary of the "Nakba" - the expulsion of the great majority of Palestinian Arabs from their homes and homeland in historic Palestine between 1947 and 1949. The expulsion - planned and systematically carried out - was essential to the creation of the state of Israel. Those dispossessed during the Nakba and their descendants now make up a refugee population of more than 4 million living without normal citizenship status. Their right to return to their home, legally recognised under international law, including United Nations resolution 194, has never been accepted by Israel.
10. Israel continues to build an 8 metre high "annexation" wall on Palestinian land inside the post-1967 occupied West Bank, contravening the July 2004 ruling by the International Court of Justice (the highest legal body in the world, whose statutes all UN members are party to) and causing the forcible separation of Palestinian communities from one another and the annexation of additional Palestinian land.

11. Within the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel continues a policy of settlement expansion in direct violation of Article 49, paragraph 6 of the 4th Geneva Convention which declares "an occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into territories it occupies." The settlements for Israelis only, housing approximately 500,000 residents, are made possible through the settler-colonial theft of Palestinian Arab land, flouting Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property."
12. Since 1967 Israel has demolished over 18 000 Palestinian family homes to sustain a policy of "quiet transfer" of the indigenous Palestinian population and the annexation of their land, leaving some 70,000 Palestinian civilians traumatised and without shelter or compensation.
13. Hundreds of kilometres of settler-only roads, on which the indigenous Palestinian Arab population is not permitted to drive, carve up the West Bank.
14. Some 500 checkpoints and roadblocks - designed to corral the Palestinian Arab population - pockmark the occupied West Bank, causing significant damage to Palestinian commerce and access to medical care and education. This ghettoization or "Bantustanization" of the Palestinian people markedly violates the spirit of Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states "everyone has the right to freedom of movement."
15. Israel engages in reckless collective punishment over the whole of the Palestinian population, with the recent siege of Gaza a prime example. According to Physicians for Human Rights, "The prolonged siege imposed by the Israeli government on Gaza, the closing of its borders, the tightening of policies regarding permission to exit Gaza for medical purposes, and the severe shortage of medications and other medical supplies all severely damage the Palestinian health system and endanger the lives and health of thousands of Palestinian patients." The Red Cross calls life in Gaza "a nightmare" for the civilian population, saying that "the whole strip is being strangled, economically speaking" with essential supplies, including electricity and fuel, being denied to the 1.5 million inhabitants where 80% depend on aid to survive.
16. Within Israel's 1948 borders, where roughly 20% of the population is Palestinian Arab, over 40 "unrecognised villages" exist housing over 100 000 Palestinian "citizens of Israel." The Israeli government ignores the existence of these villages even though many have existed for hundreds of years. These villages have not appeared on any map, they lack basic infrastructure, and the state of Israel has made numerous attempts to demolish them constituting a gross violation of human rights.
17. Israeli law openly discriminates on the basis of religion, race, and nationality, with different laws regarding citizenship, housing, land ownership, and marriage applying depending on whether someone is classified in law as "Jewish" or "non-Jewish."
18. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African anti-Apartheid activist, wrote in The Guardian: "I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa."
19. The UN's special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, South African law professor John Dugard, in a 2007 UN report concluded that "there is an apartheid regime" in the occupied Palestinian territories "worse than the one that existed in South Africa." He went on to state: "It is difficult to resist the conclusion that many of Israel's laws and practices violate the 1966 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. House demolitions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are carried out in a manner that discriminates against Palestinians. Throughout the West Bank, and particularly in Hebron, settlers are given preferential treatment over Palestinians in terms of movement (major roads are reserved exclusively for settlers), building rights and army protection; and laws governing family re-unification unashamedly discriminate against Palestinians."
20. A vital part of the global campaign against apartheid in South Africa was the tactic of boycott, whereby the anti-apartheid movements called for the severing of all links to South Africa; including economic, political, cultural, and academic.
21. Ronnie Kasrils, the Jewish South African Minister of Intelligence said "The boycotts and sanctions ultimately helped liberate both blacks and whites in South Africa. Palestinians and Israelis will similarly benefit from this non-violent campaign that Palestinians are calling for."
22. From 2002 to 2004 nearly sixty academic, professional, and cultural associations and trade unions in

the occupied West Bank, representing a broad cross section of Palestinian society, requested internationals work more actively to support Palestinian rights and specifically that those outside Palestine "promote divestment and disinvestment from Israel by international academic institutions."

23. That this Students' Union played an important role in the international solidarity campaign against South African apartheid by divesting the university's funds from South Africa. The union has a policy to boycott coca cola and nestle.
24. The University of Manchester is committed to an ethical investments policy, yet there has been a lack of progress in ending investment in the arms trade.
25. The University of Manchester continues to undertake research within the arms industry.
26. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza urgently requires aid to be brought in. Recently, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), comprising of thirteen British charities, called on all UK news broadcasters to broadcast a public appeal for Gaza. The BBC refused.

THIS UNION FURTHER NOTES

1. That Students at Manchester have a long history of showing solidarity with Palestinians, most notably in their affirmation of the "Palestine: Right to an Education" motion passed in 2007. This motion twinned our Union with the An-Najah University in the occupied West Bank, and committed the Union to campaign for the rights of Palestinian students.
2. That the March 2007 General Meeting voted overwhelmingly to support the struggles of Palestinians to realise their Right to an Education, and subsequently raised a plaque to inform students of both the denial of education and our Students' Union opposition to this.
3. That as part of our twinning with the An-Najah University our Student Union policy presently calls upon the University to offer three scholarships to Palestinian Students, which despite numerous appeals to the Vice-Chancellor has as yet been ignored.
4. That students have taken part in occupying University buildings since February 4th 2009 in solidarity with Palestine.

THIS UNION BELIEVES

1. This Union believes in a policy of non discrimination, as stated previously in union policy.
2. The Union believes that the mobilisation inside Israel against the policies of the State of Israel has been progressive. And that the Israeli government's aggressive response to the protests should be condemned.

THIS UNION RESOLVES

1. To support a day of fundraising for humanitarian relief for Gaza, with all proceeds to be given to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC).
2. To pressure the university to send surplus academic supplies to the students of Gaza on the February 14th Viva Palestina convoy, and to organise through the Union to provide logistical support for the collection of this aid.
3. To join the global Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement by divesting from Israel and boycotting all companies that support or benefit from the Israeli occupation and lobbying the University to adopt a similar BDS policy towards Israel, and to build links with student unions and other trade unions who adopt a BDS policy.
4. To condemn the university for its lack of progress in divesting from arms companies and ending all research in weapons manufacturing. And to adopt a stronger approach with the university on this issue.
5. To send a letter to the BBC condemning their refusal to air the DEC appeal for Gaza, and to place the

appeal advert in Student Direct, and on the home page of the UMSU website, until the appeal is closed.

6. To send a message of support to occupations around the country that have shown solidarity with the people of Gaza, condemned the Israeli attacks and opposed the siege of Gaza. To materially support non-violent occupations undertaken by university of Manchester students.
7. To send a public message of solidarity to the Islamic University in Gaza, whose campus has been virtually destroyed, and publish it in Student Direct.
8. To pressure the university to give full scholarships to Palestinian students as resolved at the March 2007 general meeting, as well as providing full scholarships for Israelis who have refused to serve in the IDF. As part of this the Union will furthermore forge concrete links with Israeli students, activist groups and military conscientious objectors that oppose the Israeli occupation and its recent attacks on Gaza. And to adopt a stronger approach with the university on this issue.
9. To declare unequivocal support for the occupation so far as it keeps the current demands, remains non-violent and maintains its intention not to disrupt the education of peers. To support and aid the occupation in its negotiations with the university. To support all students and staff so far as they face any repercussions.