

Is there no one to speak up for Palestine?

On the occasion of International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Bangladesh, Yousuf S Ramadan, talks to Eresh Omar Jamal of The Daily Star about some recent major developments concerning the longstanding occupation of Palestine by Israel and the forces that are contributing to the denial of Palestinians’ human rights.

Today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a UN-organised day of observance. However, it was the UN’s Resolution 181 (II) that led to the partition of Palestine and called for the establishment of “Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem”. So what role would you say has the UN played in the Palestine-Israel conflict?

Let me start by explaining the history a little bit. The Palestinian issue started immediately after the Balfour Declaration of 1917, when the British colonial regime denied our mere physical existence and pretended that Palestine is a land without a people. Then 27 years later, after the British colonial rule in Palestine, UN Resolution 181 (II) gave the right for the Jewish minority to establish a state on 54 percent of Palestinian land. So again, our individual and national rights were denied.

Although only 33 countries voted with the motion and 13 countries against it, the Palestinian people, as a result of this, were collectively uprooted and extradited to the periphery of their homeland. So that was the result of what the UN did in cooperation with the British colonial regime. It was a great injustice which brought tremendous suffering to the people of Palestine, even until today.

In 1977, the same UN tried to compensate the Palestinian people by recognising the injustice which was inflicted on them, and declaring November 29 of each year as International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. But that is not good enough for Palestinians because the suffering that we have been facing since 1948 has been unbearable. And it is unacceptable that it has lasted for such a long time.

The Balfour Declaration, as you mentioned, was written before the UN declaration that allowed for the partition



Yousuf S Ramadan, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Bangladesh.

of Palestinian land. That indicates that the decision was made long before it actually came into effect. Why would you say that is, and can it be described as a conspiracy?

Of course it was a conspiracy, that is well known. We the Palestinians were the victims of European history. The Europeans wanted to create a Jewish state in Palestine in order to get rid of the Jews from Europe. So they were given something that they did not own, and we were the ones who had to pay the price. That is why we have to remind the international community that you are responsible for the creation of the state of Israel and parallelly for the creation of our misery. That is why the international community has to take responsibility for solving this longstanding issue. What we are asking for is not absolute justice, we are asking for a possible justice.

Nelson Mandela once described the plight of the Palestinian people as “the greatest moral issue of our time”. Why don’t more world leaders talk about it, especially today?

We only ever had one Nelson Mandela. He was an icon of freedom, a man who never compromised his values. When a man like him gives such a statement, that is a reward for the people of Palestine. It makes us believe that our cause is a just cause and that one day we will get our victory and achieve our goal. It takes courage to do what he did, and not many leaders have the courage of Nelson Mandela’s.

The former leader of the British Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, did sometimes mention that we should also hear what the Palestinians have to say and for that he

has been vilified by the British media and even his own party as being an anti-Semite. However, Semitism doesn’t refer to a race, but rather a language group, which includes the Palestinians. Can you elaborate on this?

That is why the whole story from the very beginning has been one of injustice. The creation of Israel, from the beginning, was illegal. And the issue of anti-Semitism is another injustice on top of that, because all the people in the Middle East, including the Palestinians, are Semitic people. But today when you talk about being anti-Semitic, that means you are talking only against the Jews. So they have hijacked the name for themselves.

How do Palestinians view Donald Trump’s so-called “Deal of the Century” and his decision to recognise East Jerusalem as the capital of Israel? And are you more or less hopeful with a possible Biden presidency?

The four years of Trump’s presidency has been the darkest time for the Palestinian people in the 21st century. Not only was he unfair, he was so reckless that he exceeded all boundaries when it came to the Palestine-Israel issue. Not only Palestinians, but the whole Muslim world considers Jerusalem as a holy city of Islam. And when you ignore that, you ignore the right of 1.8 billion Muslim people, in order to satisfy Benjamin Netanyahu.

But facts are still facts, and Jerusalem will always be the capital of Palestine, whether Trump or Netanyahu like it or not. So the Trump administration gave us a hard time, not only by recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, shifting the US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, but also by putting tremendous pressure on countries who donate money to Palestine to stop their donations—and unfortunately the majority of those countries complied.

The Palestinian people were delighted when Trump lost the election. And we hope

Joe Biden, who was vice-president for eight years and was one of the architects of the peace process during the Obama administration, if he wants to continue to be called the leader of the free world, would help us taste that freedom. Otherwise, the peaceful struggle could become null and void and we would have to rethink our strategy in this struggle.

What is Israel’s intention, to resolve the crisis or to keep it going, because Israel is still constructing illegal settlements on Palestinian land and doesn’t seem too concerned, especially with the backing of western countries?

You are absolutely right. But let me add one thing here. The Israeli police, especially under Netanyahu, has been focused on acquiring as much of Palestinian land and removing as much of its demography as possible. We have been negotiating for 27 years with Israel and during these years of negotiations, we are supposed to see a withdrawal of the occupation. But instead of seeing a withdrawal, we have seen an expansion of the occupation. So what is the use of sitting at the table and discussing peace?

Before 1993 and before we signed the peace agreement with Israel, Israel only controlled three percent of settlements in the West Bank. Today, Israel controls 43 percent of the West Bank. So nothing is left for the Palestinians to build their state. And then comes the “Deal of the Century”, which makes it even more difficult. It offers the Palestinians an archipelago of around less than 15 or 16 percent of what was historically Palestine, and basically tells the Palestinians to go ahead and build their state there. We do not agree. This plan belongs in the garbage. And we will not even think about it.

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This is an abridged version of an online episode of Star One on One (a live video interview series) from November 28. The full interview can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/dailystarnews/videos>.

Why water and sanitation systems are vital for Bangladesh’s economy



CATARINA DE ALBUQUERQUE

WATER and sanitation are critically important to the health and survival of Bangladeshi communities. But, do decision-makers adequately prioritise and invest in the sector? The answer, in far too many parts of the world, is a resounding no. As an international community, we are too often blind to the huge cost of failing to serve so many people with the most basic but crucial of services.

Globally, there are still 2.2 billion people without access to safe drinking water and 4.2 billion who don’t have a safe place to go to the toilet. While Bangladesh has impressively eliminated the practice of open defecation, over half of Bangladeshi homes still do not have access to at least basic sanitation, and 45 percent of homes do not have access to safely-managed water services, according to a 2017 WHO/UNICEF report based on national data.

This continues to be a real challenge, yet reaching all of these people with sustainable services will take much more than physical infrastructure.

Investments need to grow—by three times, to an annual USD 114 billion, according to the World Bank—to meet the scale of the challenge. However, this is not a plea for charity, this is a wake-up call.

The current global water and sanitation crisis is a story of colossal, rapidly increasing, unmet demand leading to colossal, rapidly increasing costs. Meeting Sustainable Development Goal 6—water and sanitation for all by 2030—is not a burden but a massive opportunity.

To find concrete solutions to the financing gap, the partnership Sanitation and Water for All—a global platform for achieving the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)-related targets of the SDGs—is organising three Regional

Finance Ministers’ Meetings during November and December. The participating ministers will focus on the opportunity for economic growth and sustainable development by expanding water and sanitation services.

With the right level of investment, benefits could include an estimated 1.5 percent growth in gross domestic product, and a USD 4.30 return for every dollar invested. This is due to the likely reduced health care costs and potential for increased productivity. That’s a rate of return that any investor would wish for.

Affordable, reliable, easily accessible water and sanitation services prevent thousands of children from preventable diseases, such as diarrhoea and cholera. Healthier children absorb nutrients properly, develop stronger brains and bodies, get better school results, and end up making a fuller contribution to society. And we have seen how quickly a pandemic like Covid-19 can spread when people are not able to wash their hands with water and soap.

Without further investment, girls and women are forced to continue the time-consuming, back-breaking work of fetching water, and are left exposed to the indignity and dangers of going to the toilet in fields and streets. Water and sanitation services in schools and workplaces have the power to ensure girls and women can manage their personal hygiene while not missing out on obtaining an education or earning an income.

Adequate investment would reduce disease burden and epidemic risks, and slow down fast-moving killers such as cholera. Improved hygiene—through water and soap—is critical in the fight against Covid-19. Yet one in four—24 percent—of healthcare facilities lack basic water services; one in ten—10 percent—have no sanitation services; and one in three—32 percent—lack hand hygiene facilities at points of care. Data has shown that even where there is adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, frontline health care workers can be 12-times more likely to test positive for Covid-19 compared with individuals in the



FILE PHOTO: STAR

general community.

Unless further investments are made, the level of workforce productivity will be capped. An estimated three out of four jobs that make up the global workforce are either heavily or moderately dependent on water. But, access to water and sanitation can also free up time that would otherwise be spent collecting water. UN-Water estimates that improved sanitation gives every household an additional 1,000 hours a year to work, study, care for children, and so on. Women’s productivity is particularly affected, as they are the main caretakers and manager and users of water.

The bottom line is that economic growth

rests on improving educational achievement and public health—two things that are impossible without access to WASH.

None of this is news. Since the early days of the industrial revolution, we have known the transformative economic and social benefits of access to WASH, and the horrific consequences of inaction.

If finance ministers fail to help prioritise water and sanitation, the consequences could affect societies for generations. Financial decision-makers must create an enabling environment by investing in institutions and people, and mobilising new sources of finance, such as taxes, tariffs, transfers, or repayable

finance.

In the end, well-resourced, well-run WASH systems are catalysts for progress in every sector from gender, food and education, to health, industry and the environment.

By nature of their work, finance ministers must use evidence to make smart decisions that will help their countries flourish. In the case of WASH, the evidence is clear: continuing to neglect these services will only continue to stunt the growth of our economies, populations and societies.

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Catarina de Albuquerque is Chief Executive Officer at Sanitation and Water for All partnership.

FRIEDRICH ENGELS
(1820-1895) German philosopher.

An ounce of action is worth a ton of theory.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Finish a golf hole

5 “That was close!”

9 River vessel

10 Weather aid

12 Sports site

13 Martini garnish

14 Dance party crowd

16 TV’s Danson

17 Lofty poems

18 Pays tribute to

21 Fellows

22 Crime outings

23 Metal fastener

24 Covered

26 Had lunch

29 Carpentry tool

30 Water, to Juan

31 Second person

32 Frugal folks

34 Honeydew, for one

37 “You Send Me” singer Sam

38 Peace goddess

39 Irritates

40 Hearty dish

41 Whirlpool

DOWN

1 Holiday event

2 Irregular

3 Musical sounds

4 Eye drop

5 Paid player

6 “2001” computer

7 Book worker

8 Hesitates

9 Billiards shot

11 Cincinnati team

15 Young lads

19 Commentary piece

20 Volleyball need

22 Refer to

23 Ewe’s mate

24 Spelunkers

25 Egggy dish

26 Ancient

27 Thanksgiving staple

28 Moves cautiously

29 High-end car engine

30 Steer clear of

33 Land unit

35 Low digit

36 Fresh

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