

Commentary

An open letter from 'Jews who do not support the Israeli occupation of Palestine'

By MEMBERS OF
MINNESOTA JEWS FOR JUSTICE

Throughout the current crisis in the Middle East, numerous Jewish American organizations have expressed both unconditional support for the actions of the Israeli government and vehement condemnation of the Palestinian Authority. As Jewish Americans who have long worked for social justice on a variety of fronts, and who support peaceful coexistence between the Palestinian Arab and Israeli Jewish peoples, we wish to make clear that these organizations do not speak for us. Nor do they speak for many other American Jews who have not yet voiced their opinions, or who have spoken and found their views ignored or maligned by the media or by other Jews.

We mourn all the deaths. We abhor the loss of Jewish lives in this conflict and the tragic implications of the renewed violence for Israel. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that the overwhelming number of families shedding tears for loved ones slain or maimed these past four months have been Palestinian. We are both pained and outraged by the killing of more than Palestinians, including Palestinian citizens of Israel, by Israeli forces that are, in effect, an occupying army in the areas under siege. We strongly support the call for immediate international protection of the Palestinian people.

We refute the view that the Palestinian Authority is responsible for initiating the current conflict, and condemn the arrogant and deliberately provocative action of Ariel Sharon that set the chain of bloody events in motion. We likewise deplore the support that the Israeli government provided for Sharon's trip to the disputed holy site despite the fact that he was beseeched not to go by many who were apprised of his intentions in advance and the government's failure to sanction him after the fact. This is not the first time

Sharon's hateful and irresponsible conduct has had deadly consequences for Palestinians. And now, he has just won the election.

We support the Palestinian right to self-determination. In this, we take our inspiration from the long history of Jewish participation in struggles for liberation and justice for all peoples, a history that is stained by Israel's current status as an abusive occupying power. As Jews, how can we fail to recognize and condemn the flagrant injustice of Israel's disproportionate use of massive military might including high velocity bullets, helicopter gunships and anti-tank missiles against a Palestinian civilian population armed mostly with stones?

Fifty years of conflict have increasingly compromised the ideals that contributed to Israel's founding and have caused a new generation of Israelis to suffer for political goals that many Jews inside and outside Israel do not share.

We, as Jews, refuse to allow our views to be characterized either as the product of "internalized anti-Semitism" or as a "betrayal" of our people just because we do not participate in the unqualified support of Israel that's expected of us as Jewish Americans. We are proud Jews who are well aware that anti-Semitism continues to thrive and to impact Jews around the world. We actively challenge anti-Semitism and all other forms of discrimination through our work for social change. But we unequivocally reject the view that the experience of having been victimized legitimates or excuses the exploitation of



Quique Kierszenbaum/JTA

Israeli Arabs in Nazareth (above) clashed with Israeli police last fall. "As Jews, how can we fail to recognize and condemn the flagrant injustice of Israel's disproportionate use of massive military might including high velocity bullets, helicopter gunships and anti-tank missiles against a Palestinian civilian population armed mostly with stones?"

others.

As Jews, we call upon the Israeli government to end immediately its immoral and illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and to dismantle the unlawful Jewish settlements it

has used to subvert the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. Such actions would demonstrate Israel's true commitment to achieving peaceful coexistence alongside a sovereign Palestine, and would honor the tradition of justice that infuses Jewish teachings, Jewish practice and Jewish history.

As United States citizens, we call upon our own government to support the Palestinian appeal for immediate international protection. The need for protective forces could not be more urgent, as the conflict escalates and the numbers of dead and wounded rise daily.

We also call for an end to the U.S. government's political and diplomatic support for Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, and for termination of our government's substantial economic subsidization of the occupation. We seek a national policy that supports the right to Palestinian self-determination and peace with justice for Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Finally, we call upon American Jews to join us in speaking out in every way you can. Contact the Israeli consulate. Write to President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, local and national elected officials, and the editors of the publications you read. Challenge those around you who continue to support Israel uncritically. Educate yourself about Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights. Support the work of groups fighting for Palestinian sovereignty and dignity.

And remember what our own history tells us: Silence in the face of injustice is complicity with injustice.

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