

75 Years of Nakba: A Stark Reminder of Israel's Colonialism

BEN JAMAL calls for solidarity against the ongoing dispossession and occupation of Palestinian land by Israel in full view of the world ahead of next weekend's anniversary march

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Next Saturday, May 13 2023, thousands will gather in London to attend a march organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign and partners, supported by 10 national trade unions.

They will march to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Nakba, not as an historical moment of collective national trauma but as an ongoing process of colonisation, dispossession, and occupation.

This annual act of solidarity is needed now more urgently than ever.

In December, Israel's newly elected far-right government, the most ultra-nationalist in its history with members who are self-declared fascists and proud racists, launched its formal platform.

In article one it unashamedly reasserted that only Jewish people had the right to settlement in "the Land of Israel" — a term that has no meaning in international law but is used to describe all of historic Palestine including the West Bank, alongside parts of other countries including Jordan.

The programme included renewed plans to move forward with the illegal annexation of the West Bank and expansion of illegal settlements.

Alongside taking steps to implement these policies, Benjamin Netanyahu's extremist regime has ramped up its repression of Palestinian resistance, killing, since the beginning of January, more than 100 Palestinians, at the rate of roughly one a day.

In February, with the approval of the Netanyahu government, Israeli settlers descended on the village of Huwara setting fire to homes and cars, attacking villagers and killing one, as Israeli soldiers watched on.

Even an Israeli military commander described this as a pogrom. Some days after, government minister Bezalel Smotrich declared that “the village of Huwara needs to be wiped out.”

The election and actions of the Netanyahu government have provoked unprecedented demonstrations of protest on the streets of Israel, mirrored by demonstrations here in Britain by ex-pat Israelis and liberal Zionists.

However, what is fuelling these protests is not the ultra-nationalist agenda and its consequences for Palestinians, but rather the government’s assault on the democratic rights of Jewish citizens.

The reality for Palestinians is that Israel has never been a democracy. The Nakba anniversary is a moment for us to remember the real facts of history.

The state established by Israel in 1948 acquired a Jewish majority via a process of driving into exile over 750,000 Palestinians including my grandparents and extended family.

Palestinians who remained as minority citizens of the state were placed under military rule for nearly two decades and denied equal citizenship with Israeli Jews, an unequal status that continues to the present day.

Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem have lived under military occupation since 1967, subject to ongoing blockade, repeated military assaults, loss of freedom of movement, illegal theft and settlement of their land, destruction of their homes and illegitimate detention, imprisonment, and torture.

Palestinians across historic Palestine and those in exile are denied the right of return and deprived of their rights under a system of oppression that meets the definition of apartheid – a crime against humanity.

The judiciary whose independence liberal Zionists are so desperate to preserve in the name of democratic freedom is the same court which has consistently given approval to these processes.

Those voices who seek to celebrate Israel’s democracy and rail against the threats to it posed by Netanyahu can only do so by erasing from history and from their own consciousness the existence of the Palestinian people.

We saw this process of erasure in grotesque form in the statement issued last week by Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, when she congratulated Israel on 75 years of “vibrant democracy” — reiterating the anti-Palestinian racist trope that Israel had succeeded in making an empty desert bloom.

We see this erasure manifesting in the British government’s rolling out of the red carpet and issuing of a new trade deal with Netanyahu and his ultra-nationalist zealots, all while asserting a deep concern for “democratic freedom” as the underpinning for its sanctions-led

response to Russia's illegal invasion of the Ukraine.

We see it at play when Labour leader Keir Starmer slaps down one of his MPs for the temerity of using the word "apartheid" to describe Palestinian oppression, no matter the decades old testimony of Palestinian civil society, and the more recent confirmatory reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

The union members, students and citizens of conscience marching with us on May 13 know the truths of Palestinian history and the realities of the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people and refuse to be silent in the face of them.

They understand that there is no coherent anti-racist position that does not have at its heart resistance and opposition to Israel's system of apartheid.

They understand the responsibilities owed by British citizens in the context of more than 100 years of British complicity in Palestinian oppression, stretching all the way back to Balfour in 1917.

That is why they march, and that is why as they march, they will again take up the cry, "in our thousands and our millions, we are all Palestinians." Join us!

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Featured image: ETHNIC CLEANSING: Palestinian refugees in 1948 Photo: Public Domain

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