

Apartheid in Israel

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Global Research, February 11, 2016

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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The lack of human dignity experienced by Palestinian Arabs is the direct result of the policy of Israeli supremacy. Israeli supremacy implies Arab inferiority. Legislation designed to preserve Israeli supremacy entrenches this notion. Menial tasks in Israel are invariably performed by Arabs. When anything has to be carried or cleaned, the Israeli will look around for an Arab to do it for him, whether the Arab is employed by him or not.

Because of this sort of attitude, Israelis tend to regard Palestinian Arabs as a separate breed. They do not look upon them as people with families of their own; they do not realise that they have emotions – that they fall in love like Israelis do; that they want to be with their wives and children like Israelis want to be with theirs; that they want to earn enough money to support their families properly, to feed and clothe them and send them to school. And what Arab servant or labourer can ever hope to do this?

ID laws, which to Palestinians are the most hated bits of legislation in Israel, render any Arab liable to police surveillance at any time. I doubt that there is a single Palestinian male in Israel who has not at some stage had a brush with the police over his ID papers. Hundreds and thousands of Arabs are thrown into jail each year under these laws. Even worse than this is the fact that these discriminatory laws keep husband and wife apart and lead to the breakdown of family life.

Arabs want to be paid a living wage. Arabs want to perform work which they are capable of doing, and not work which the government declares them to be capable of. Arabs want to be allowed to live where they obtain work, and not be endorsed out of an area because they were not born there. Arabs want to be allowed to own land in places where they work, and not be obliged to live in rented houses which they can never call their own.

Arabs want to be part of the general population, and not confined to living in their own ghettos. Arab men want to have their wives and children to live with them where they work and not be forced into an unnatural existence in men's hostels. Arab women want to be with their menfolk and not be permanently widowed in IDF policed villages.

Palestinian Arabs want to be allowed to travel freely within their own country and to seek work where they want to and not where the Labour Ministry tells them to. Arabs want a just share in the whole of former Palestine; they want security and a stake in society.

Above all, we want equal political rights although we know this makes the Israeli fear democracy. But this fear cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the only solution which will guarantee racial harmony and freedom for all. It is not true that enfranchisement of all will result in racial domination. Political division, based on ethnicity or religion, is entirely

artificial, and when it disappears, so will the domination of one ethnic group over another. Western democracies have spent nearly a century fighting against racialism.

This struggle is a national one. It is a struggle for the right to live.

**Taken from a speech by the late Nelson Mandela, the first President of an independent South Africa.*

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