



‘A NATION SHOULD NOT BE JUDGED BY HOW IT TREATS ITS HIGHEST CITIZENS, BUT ITS LOWEST ONES’ - NELSON MANDELA

BY FARAH ABDEL

The impending death of Nelson Mandela has undoubtedly prompted the world to reminisce on his inspirational life achievements and I too have been influenced to do the same. I was reminded of Mandela’s role as an anti-apartheid revolutionary. It reminds me of my journey with family to Palestine as a 12 year old girl in 2007.

Despite being a violation of international law, apartheid regulated South Africa from 1948 until 1994. The South African National Party led a system of racial segregation where the rights of the black inhabitants of South Africa were removed in order to preserve white supremacy. In his efforts to destroy this apartheid regime, Mandela announced that there is ‘no such thing as part freedom’ for ‘freedom would be meaningless without security in the home and in the streets.’ Mandela’s spoken truth resulted in his 27 years of imprisonment.

The South African apartheid seems analogous to the modern Arab-Israeli conflict. Following the series of Arab-Israeli wars from 1947-1949, approximately 700,000 Palestinians fled the country or were expelled from their homes. This resulted in



the formation of the Israeli state, who then took control of the area recommended by the UN General Assembly Resolution 181 as well as control of 60% of Arab land allocated by the United Nations. Since then, Israel has forced a daily struggle and oppression onto the Palestinian people. It is difficult not to notice the likeness between the South African Apartheid regime and that of Israeli-occupied territories and I witnessed it.

In the summer of 2007, I embarked on a routine visit to the Middle East with my family, first to Syria to visit my mother's family and then to Jordan, to visit my father's. For the first time, since migrating from the Middle East in 1999, my family and I visited Palestine. I knew the history, I heard the stories and watched the news, but nothing prepared me for events that I would experience, the things that I would witness and the emotions I would soon feel. What should have been a peaceful and secure journey (due to the Australian passport) was made tense and difficult due to our obvious Arabic heritage.

I witnessed the Israelis control each place we visited. I saw the "Jewish-only" settlements, the separate states, towns and roads for the dispersed Israeli and Palestinian citizens. I waited at several military checkpoints for hours at a time to reach our destination, where I

stood among the many Palestinian Arabic men and women who made their four hour journey to work, only to be used as cheap labour. Some people would fight their way to the front of the gate in frustration. Others waited in silence, indicating how this routine has sadly become convention for some.

I witnessed a woman being refused entry into a town at a checkpoint because she was clearly of an Arabic heritage. I watched her suffer through emotions of despair, sadness and anger as she missed her sister's funeral, for which she travelled from Jordan, whilst the Israeli soldiers who refused her entry laughed and socialised among one another. I saw dozens of army tanks and thousands of armed soldiers patrolling towns, scaring children and monitoring set curfew times.

I drove along the notorious 'Wall'; a 700 kilometre Israeli West Bank barrier which separates the State of Israel from the Palestinian West Bank; a wall which separates and exacerbates different cultures and cultural tensions. On either side of the wall there is a stark contrast in infrastructure and living conditions. Thousands of armed Israeli soldiers patrol the wall's border and create further apprehension among the Palestinian people. Yet, the world does not appear to care.

In hindsight, and from a contemporary Western perspective, it is truly shocking that apartheid was law and system for 46 years in South Africa. While the world became increasingly aware and opposed to this system in South Africa, the Palestinians suffered and continue to suffer in silence. Apartheid no longer exists for the South Africans. Apartheid however is still law for the Palestinians: 65 years and running.

In 1973, the UN made Apartheid an international crime under the *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*. International critics of the Israeli national and international policy make an analogy between Israel and South Africa and accuse Israel of committing the crime of apartheid. Opponents to this analogy claim that it is intended to deligitimise Israel and say their policy is enacted for security concerns in order to protect them from Palestinian terrorist organisations.

I wonder how much longer Israel and the USA will be able to use security concerns as a means of justifying their own terrorism, not just on Palestine, but on nations worldwide. How much longer will our society be brainwashed to overlook the fact that Israel and its alliances possess superior weaponry, money, strength and the most powerful nations on their side and use the media to produce an apprehensive and mindless society? If they are at a “war on terror”, then they are at war with themselves.



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OUR FREEDOM IS INCOMPLETE
WITHOUT THE FREEDOM OF
THE PALESTINIANS.’**

– NELSON MANDELA