

AMBASSADORS FORUM

100 YEARS OF THE BALFOUR DECLARATION -A BLOOD-DRENCHED CENTENARY¹

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This week, the Palestinian People mark 100 years since the Balfour Declaration was issued on November 2, 1917. On that day, the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour addressed a letter to Lionel Walter Rothschild, a figurehead of the British Jewish community promising the land of Palestine to the Zionist Federation.

As the late Palestinian academic Edward Said described it, the Balfour declaration was made: "(a) by a European power, (b) about a non-European territory, (c) in a flat disregard of both the presence and the wishes of the native majority residents in that territory, and (d) it took the form of a promise about this same territory to another foreign group."

The Balfour Declaration continued with a British Mandate of Palestine 1922-1948. The Jewish settlers who came from Europe in the period between the two World Wars intended as planned by the Zionist movement to create their own "pure Jewish state" despite the will of Muslim and Christian majority (94%). British colonial rule helped the Jewish immigrants to settle in Palestine and provided support to the Zionist militias by training them and supplying them with arms. Concomitantly, British colonial rule repressed Palestinian movements who opposed British policies which were exemplified by its crushing of the remarkable national strike of 1936.

We the Palestinian People see The Balfour Declaration as the precursor to the 1948 Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe), when the Zionist militias forcibly expelled more than million Palestinians, perpetrating horrific massacres and destroying more than five hundred towns and villages and the Jewish state has been established in more than three quarters of the total area of Palestine. More than two-thirds of the Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, were expelled. Families, children and old

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people were forced to take refuge in the neighboring countries carrying nothing but a horrible suffering and hope that they will return one day to their home.

The Organization of United Nations founded camps for them at the fringes of Arab capitals and towns.

In spite of suffering, affliction and miserable life in those camps, Palestinians did not lose hope to return to their home.

When Palestinians woke up from the enormity of the shock they started to struggle to retrieve their rights. All freedom fans and justice advocates have supported them in that. The Organization of United Nations has recognized their rights and brought out hundreds of resolutions that imply them.

In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of the Palestinian territories and expelled hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

After more than a quarter of the century and many wars, an agreement was signed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel in 1993, which contains reciprocal recognition, and a declaration of principles implying the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the towns of West Bank and Gaza Strip as well as starting the negotiations concerning the final status after five years from the date of agreement in order to reach the result of establishing the Palestinian state on the whole territories that Israel occupied in 1967.

Instead of that:

- Israel has not stopped erecting colonies which swallow the territories of West Bank.
- Israel erects winding roads for those colonies, which increase the area of confiscated territories.
- Israel has not stopped building the racist separating wall, which is snaking through the West Bank. It is a monstrous eight meters high wall made of concrete, the wall is an entire regime composed of razor wire, trenches, watchtowers, electric fences and ditches, fractionating Palestinian towns and villages in a merciless way, extirpating thousands of olive trees, grapevines, distorting the beauty of nature. Despite the fact that the International Court of Justice (9 July 2004) asserted that it is contrary to international law and that Israel is under obligation to discontinue construction of the Wall and dismantle those sections that have already been built forthwith, Israel continued establishing the Wall.
- Israel has not stopped killing and arresting Palestinians; therefore, there are more than 6,500 Palestinians in Israeli jails (among them 300 children and 57 women). Israeli occupation authorities arrested more than 1,000,000 Palestinians since 1948.

- Israel erects more than 500 checkpoints around and between the Palestinian towns. Some of those bunkers look like borders that Palestinians cannot pass without permissions from the Israeli army. Those checkpoints transform the life of Palestinians to an unimaginable daily suffering.
- The Israeli army launched three horribly devastating wars on the Gaza Strip targeting mainly civilians:
 - In 2008, 1,436 Palestinians were killed (410 children, 104 women, and 100 old men) and 5,400 injured, half of them were children.
 - In 2012, 162 Palestinians were killed (among them 42 children and 11 women) and 162 injured.
 - In 2014, 1,742 Palestinians were killed (among them 530 children and 302 women) and 8,710 injured. Also, 11 employees of UNRWA and 23 employees of ambulance teams were killed. 13,217 homes were demolished.
- Furthermore, two million residents in Gaza endure a worsening humanitarian situation after a decade of the Israeli blockade.
- Israel continues its Settlement policy and Judaization of Jerusalem attempting to change the Islamic and Christian features of the city and destroy its Arab identity.
- The Israeli Government has been practicing a racist policy via a system of institutionalized discrimination against Palestinians who managed to remain in their homes in the territory occupied in 1948.

WHY?

Hundred years passed from the Balfour Declaration, more than ten wars in the Middle East, hundreds of thousands were killed, and millions have become refugees, losses estimated at trillions of dollars - all that stems from the Balfour Declaration.

In the common Palestinian memory, Nakba and the whole tragedy that occurred to the Palestinian People after that is linked to the Balfour Declaration.

A question arises why the United Kingdom has not yet apologized for the Balfour Declaration?

Why the UK government does not listen to the voice of the Palestinian people who were victimized by this declaration and has been suffering for a hundred years, and the voice of those who have petitioned their government to apologize for the Balfour Declaration, the NGOs and solidarity groups turning out on the streets, advocating tirelessly for our rights as Palestinians?

It is time for the British government to do make concrete steps towards ending the occupation on the basis of international law and resolutions, including the UN

Resolution 194 concerning the rights of the Palestinian refugees, and recognizing the state Palestine within the 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Repudiating the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people would embed the apartheid system in Israel and perpetuates the conflict.