

**CONFERENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING GROUP ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE,
United Nations Office, Geneva, 3-4 April 2024**

“Building Bridges with International Civil Society to Address the ongoing Nakba.”

**PANEL 2: The Role of Civil Society Organisations in ensuring Third Party Responsibility:
Perspectives from Global and Regional Voices**

**THE RESOLUTION OF THE SEEMINGLY INTRACTABLE CHALLENGE OF PALESTINE/ISRAEL BY
GETTING TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM**

Frank Chikane

On my first visit to Palestine/Israel in 1988 - as the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) - I had an opportunity to see and be exposed to experiences on both side of the divideⁱ in Palestine/Israel. For one who was living and was suffering under a neo-colonial, racist apartheid regime in South Africa it was not difficult for me to reach the conclusion that the Israeli regime from the river (Jordan) to the (Mediterranean) sea was more than just a racist apartheid system.

After making a public statement that what I had seen was much worse than the apartheid system in South Africa which was declared by the UN as a crime against humanity, I was condemned by Zionists lobbies as being anti-Semitic. This made no sense to me. I could not understand how a reality analysis based on fact became anti-Semitic.

In my last but one visit as part of a delegation of Church leaders, in May 2022, we visited families at Sheikh Jarrah and other places whose houses were either demolished or were under threat of being evicted by marauding gangs of Zionists groups who felt like totally lawless to me without any intervention by the Israeli government. The gangs were empowered by a racist discriminatory law which allows Jews from anywhere in the world to come to Palestine and claim land they believed belonged to their ancestors ages ago. On the other, hand Palestinians who still had keys for their houses in Haifa and in other places within Israel from which they were forced to leave in 1948, had no right to return, just because they were Palestinians or that they were not Jews. This experience to me proved beyond any doubt that this was indeed a racist apartheid system.

The Nation State Law passed by the Knesset in 2018 sealed it all for me forcing one to review the history of the development of the Jewish State as against the resistance to establish a Palestinian State since Resolution 181 of the United Nations.

Drilling down further past the 1967 war to 1947/48, one is confronted with the horror story of the *Nakba* (catastrophe), starting with Resolution 181 (1947) which unleashed violent conflicts. This is critical to enable us to find a sustainable resolution of the problem of Palestine/Israel. The war that followed was fueled by the anger of Palestinians relating to the partitioning of their homeland, on the one hand, and on the other, a racist Zionist ideology intend on exterminating or driving Arab Palestinians out of their homeland where they had lived in peace together with Jewish Palestinians notwithstanding their oppression by colonial regimes and empires. It is worth noting that at that time there were about 750 000 Arab Palestinians and just more than 120 000 Jewish Palestiniansⁱⁱ. Based on this Zionist ideology this three-quarters of a million

Palestinians had to be forced out of Palestine by any means to have a purely Jewish State. The consequence of this perspective would be ethnic cleansing.

The tragedy about all this is that the world of the time (League of Nations/United Nations)ⁱⁱⁱ turned a blind eye to this catastrophe (Nakba) as it has done and is doing with the genocide in Gaza. Instead, it (this world) built the State of Israel on this catastrophe without honouring the commitment^{iv} to have a Palestinian (Arab) State as per Resolution 181.

This for me was the beginning – the root cause - of the tragedy we are facing today. The racist and colonial world of the time made a fatal mistake of establishing a settler-colonial apartheid system at the time when the colonial era was winding out. The process of decolonization was in full speed in 1948. Interestingly, 1948 is also the year when the whites only National Party in South Africa set out to formalize the apartheid system with racist laws that defined what it was about. It is thus not surprising that a close relationship was built between Israel's settler-colonial and apartheid regime and the neocolonial apartheid system in South Africa.

I would like to submit that building the Israeli State on the Nakba (catastrophe) for Palestinians, with the support of the Western Allies, was a recipe for a build-in permanent insecurity for the State of Israel leading to wars and ultimately the illegal occupation of Palestinians for the last fifty-seven years or so. It also led to the blockade of Gaza for more than sixteen years.

Only the colonial and racist minds would expect that illegally occupied and blockaded people who are brutalized daily and killed without recourse to any law or justice would accept it and not resist it by any means available to them. If any of the Western countries were subjected to what the Palestinians are subjected to over these many years hell would break loose, and what is called terrorism today would be called “acts of defense” or resistance to a gross violation of their rights.

Besides mass protest actions to stop this madness and genocide in Gaza and the increased levels of killings and brutalization of the Palestinians in the West Bank, we in South Africa pursued a strategy which is now seen as a two-pronged strategy: Action by the State and action by civil society.

The action by the Government of South Africa to present the case at the International Court of Justice that Israel is engaged in a genocide which is against the Genocide Convention, is well known and well documented and does not need further elaboration.

What I would like to present to this Conference is about the civil society action which has led to the convening of a Global Anti-Apartheid Conference on Palestine to work towards ending Israel's settler-colonial apartheid system from the River (Jordan) to the Sea (Mediterranean Sea) and support both Palestinians and Israelis who are well meaning to find a more just solution that will ensure that Palestinians and Israelis to live together in peace.

The Global Anti-Apartheid Conference is scheduled for the 10-12 May 2024 in South Africa. The venue is now going to be the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg. Invitations have been sent to veteran Anti-Apartheid activists, and all other sectors of society globally to attend the Conference. The objective is to send a clear message to Israel and its allies that, the time has come, to end this settler-colonial racist apartheid system and ensure that there is peace in that region.

We as South African were asked by Palestinians to convene such a global anti-apartheid conference to mobilise the people of the world, in the way in which it was done for South Africa

to end the settler-colonial apartheid regime from the river to the sea. We believe that States which are in general subject to the “empire” of our time are not capable of ending this monstrosity. That is why they would propose one resolution after another without success until 32 333 Palestinians were mercilessly killed, 14 280 of them children, 9340 women and 1049 elderly in Gaza. 74 694 were injured in a situation where the hospitals are bombed and a blockade stops supplies of medical supplies, and many of them are maimed, without limbs. Worse more such a resolution is ignored by Israel.

The complicity of the major Western countries in this genocide has emboldened the Israeli regime to complete the Zionist project – a completion of the Nakba - which is well articulated by the current Finance Minister, Bezael Smotrich, by forcing Palestinians to leave (Palestine), submit or die (genocide) in his article entitled “Israel’s Decisive Plan”^v.

Like the Anti-Apartheid Movement for South Africa, we plan to **mobilise the citizens of the world to apply pressure** on their governments and business communities to stop supporting this gross injustice against Palestinians and thereby becoming **accomplices to the crime of genocide**. We need to **mobilise for comprehensive sanctions** against Israel to force them to reconcile themselves with the reality that the new world we are living in has gone beyond the colonial and racist way of thinking. That this new world demands justice for all irrespective of colour, ethnicity and nationality.

We **call for an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine** and the **apartheid regime** between the river and the sea. We call for a new reality where Jewish Israelis and Arab Palestinians can live together in peace without discrimination among themselves.

The reluctance of the world, particularly the Western world, to accept the reality that there shall be no lasting peace in this region without justice for Palestinians is the root cause of the perpetual conflict that has caused so many lives. Lasting peace cannot be achieved without justice for the Palestinians. Secondly, the world needs to accept that “justice is indivisible” as Martin Luther King and Angela Davis have argued. Justice must be equal justice for Israelis and Palestinians. Thirdly, there can be no security for Israel without security for Palestinians. Mutual security is the only way to ensure security for all.

Lastly, I would like to say that history has shown that **no empire lasts forever**. And that those who have power must know that **power also does come to an end**. That if one has power, one must **use it circumspectly** for the good of all of humanity rather than for one’s own sectarian interests.

ⁱ The Chief Rabbi in South Africa then arranged for me to visit Palestine/Israel and spent two days on each side of the divide, listen to them and make up my mind about the situation.

ⁱⁱ At the time both Jews and Arabs were considered as Palestinian as the territory was known as such.

ⁱⁱⁱ The world of the time was one with a colonial mind and racist and was steeped in a Zionist ideology whose formalization as a state matter was based in the so-called Balfour Declaration of 1917.

^{iv} See UN Resolution 181(II).

^v See Bezael Smotrich’s Paper entitled “Israel’s Decisive Plan” (2017).