

Don't Ask Palestinians if They Recognize Israel

April 3, 2009

Open Letter to Canadian Immigrant Magazine

Thank you for writing the article "Airwaves of hope" (<http://www.canadianimmigrant.ca/immigrantstories/career/article/3298>) that featured my volunteer work on Voice of Palestine.

Your reporting was generally positive and accurate except where you state: "But Kawas, who says he acknowledges the right of Israel to exist as a state, ...". I believe either you misunderstood what I told you, or the insertion of this statement was an editorial decision not to offend the pro-Israel propaganda machine.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain why such a statement is unfair, offensive and upsetting to me and to the vast majority of Palestinians.

1. Israel as a state was build on stolen Palestinian land and as a result of the ethnic cleansing of the majority of the Palestinian people from their homeland. In the process of the establishment of the state of Israel over four hundred Palestinian towns and villages were wiped out from the map of the world (<http://www.palestine-studies.org/books.aspx?id=591&href=details>) and two thirds of the Palestinian people were ethnically cleansed from their homeland and have never been allowed to return to their homes (<http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/3041>) .
2. Israel as a state is an apartheid supremacist state where Palestinians, both Muslims and Christians, that constitute 20% of the Israeli population, are treated as second-class citizens. Calls continue to this day to ethnically cleanse the indigenous Palestinian people from their homeland, and the current Israel foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman is a prime example. Israel is not a state for all of its citizens, and offers privileges based solely on religious affiliation.
3. The Zionist movement that built the state of Israel is a settler colonialist ideology that was never happy with the usurpation of just 78% of historic Palestine. It is an expansionist movement that continues to this day to steal more Palestinian land and build new illegal Jewish only settlements on this land, something the new Israeli government is set to not only maintain but also aggressively increase.
4. The state of Israel has never adopted a constitution nor defined its borders. As a result of this omission, Israeli borders keep expanding. From the 56% of Palestine the UN Partition Plan allotted to a "Jewish State" to now all of Palestine plus other Arab lands.

So the fair and logical question is: Do you want me to recognize the rape and dismemberment of my country Palestine? Do you want me to recognize the thief who stole my land and murdered my people? Do you want me to recognize a racist apartheid state that to this day does not allow me to go back home to live, nor be buried in my homeland where I was born? Do you want me to

recognize a state with elastic borders that keeps committing injustices and war crimes on daily basis?

During your interview with me, we were talking about a solution to the conflict and this is where, I believe, your misunderstanding has risen. I am sure the space and political limitations on your article contributed to that, so let me repeat what I did say and what I believe in.

- I believe that there will never be peace or recognition, not tomorrow and not even in another sixty-one years, unless justice prevails. That means that first Israeli Jews should recognize the injustice that befell the Palestinian people in 1947/48, and second, pledge and work to rectify these injustices.
- I believe that Israeli racist laws should be dismantled as discrimination between Jew and non-Jew is institutionalized in Israeli laws and infrastructure. An example of this is the Israeli law of return, which applies to any Jew in the world (Israeli or not) while the same law does not apply to Palestinians holding Israeli citizenship because they happen to be Muslims or Christians. Without recognizing the inherent inequalities of such laws and reversing them there can be no peace with justice
- I believe that discrimination of any kind is not conducive to reconciliation. Discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation in land ownership is neither democratic nor ethical. For example, 93 per cent of the land in Israel, mostly stolen from Palestinians, is controlled by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and its affiliates and is reserved by law for Jewish citizens only, something that is being challenged right now even in Israeli courts.
- Another manifestation of the injustices of the ethnic cleansing of 1947/48 is the creation of the Palestinian refugees. There are around six million Palestinian refugees and their descendents are crying out for justice and for UN resolutions regarding the Palestinian refugees to be implemented. Without the acknowledgement of the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian refugees, including their right of return and to compensation, there can be no mutual recognition or reconciliation.

Here is what I do recognize now at this moment in history.

- As I stated before I recognize the inalienable historic human and national rights of the Arab Palestinian people in historic Palestine.
- I recognize the fact that 60% of Israeli Jews are actually Arab Jews (Sephardim). They should be welcomed to live in any Arab country if they so choose and they are entitled to equal rights and privileges in any Arab country, especially in Palestine.
- I recognize that the vast majority of Israeli Jews are now native to historic Palestine (Israel/Palestine). At least three generations of Israeli Jews were born on the land since the original sin of 1947/48. They should not carry the guilt of their Zionist settler parents who committed the original sin and the initial ethnic cleansing of Palestine, but they are responsible for their own actions.

We have entered the 21st century. Peace anywhere in the world, and especially in the Middle East, will never be achieved if we have states that give privileges to one group over another,

based on religion or ethnicity or gender. This is an outdated concept that will only hold all of us back from achieving true reconciliation.

Finally, only after the conditions of equality, decency and morality are met, and after a referendum to decide on the name of the country among the citizens of the land of Israel/Palestine, only then could I say I recognize Israel if that name is chosen by the majority of the people of Palestine/Israel.

Would we have asked the South African blacks to recognize Apartheid, before we took note of the legitimacy of their struggle? Would we have asked the French resistance to recognize the Vichy government and the Nazi regime before we acknowledged the credibility of their goals? No, and it is grossly unfair to tell Palestinians that they must recognize the state that is building an annexation wall on their land and massacring civilians in Gaza, before those same Palestinians will be allowed to have a say in their future.

Only with justice, freedom and equality for all will there be peace in historic Palestine, the Holy Land, and accordingly on earth.

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