

Minister Naledi Pandor's Speech to the Palestine Solidarity Forum (UCT)

Israeli Apartheid Week, UCT

14 March 2018

South Africa's foreign policy is based on advancing the interests of the South, including the urgent need to reform the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council.

We actively engage and seek cooperation with developing countries, and support important coalitions such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

There is an urgent need for us as the ANC and government to re-energise our contribution to concluding concrete solutions to the impasse that is preventing the people of Palestine from achieving freedom and statehood.

The ANC has a long-standing relationship to the people of Palestine and their struggle.

When Arafat visited South Africa in 1998, President Mandela welcomed him with the following words:

We have long looked forward to your first State Visit to our country. It is a distinct honour to welcome Palestine's first President to South Africa, both because your name is revered by millions in South Africa, and because you come as a leader of a people who have shared with us the experience of struggle for justice.

South Africans drew courage and strength from the support so generously given by the Palestinian people even though they themselves lacked freedom.

Now that we have achieved our freedom, we have not forgotten our friends and allies who helped us liberate ourselves. As former beneficiaries of selfless international support. South Africans have a duty to lend a supportive hand to others seeking justice and equality.

As we give our freedom lasting meaning by the improvement of our people's lives through reconstruction and development, we daily confirm for ourselves that peace, prosperity and security are possible only if they are enjoyed by all without discrimination. And daily we reap the benefits of having joined hands to work together for the things that unite us.

It is in that spirit that South Africa has fervently supported the Middle East peace process.

On Arafat's death in 2004, President Mandela said: "Yasser Arafat was one of the outstanding freedom fighters of this generation, one who gave his entire life to the cause of the Palestinian people. We honour his memory today."

In December 2017 the 54th conference of the ANC committed to giving practical support to the oppressed people of Palestine:

"We reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Western Sahara, Palestine and Cuba. Delegates endorsed the proposal that we must give practical support to the oppressed people of Palestine and resolved on an immediate and unconditional downgrade of the SA embassy in Israel to a Liaison Office."

The resolution was adopted with the intention of firmly indicating that South Africa wishes to see a just peace in Palestine.

International reports have highlighted the tragic abuse that is the daily life experience of the people of Palestine. The world has grown used to observing the suffering and doing nothing.

There has been consternation in Israel about the ANC decision, but the decision does not detract from our commitment to a two-state solution. It does express our dismay and anger at the absence of any attempt by Israel and its powerful friends in the north to free the people of Palestine on the impression from the oppression they suffer today.

The education system for Palestinians inside Israel and in the occupied Palestinian Territories is deeply discriminatory. Palestinians receive less funding, fewer teachers, and Arab students and lecturers are underrepresented in Israel's universities and other institutes of higher education.

To put this in perspective, let me remind you that three key features characterized the education and training system under apartheid.

First, the system was fragmented along racial and ethnic lines, and children were taught the racist ideology and educational doctrines of apartheid.

Second, there was unequal access to education and training at all levels of the system. Vast disparities existed between black and white schooling and large numbers of black children and adults had little or no access to education and

training.

Third, there was a lack of democratic control within the education and training system. Students, teachers, parents, and workers were excluded from deciding what sort of education they wanted.

The fragmented, unequal, and undemocratic nature of the education and training system has had profound effects on the development of the economy and society. It resulted in the destruction, distortion or neglect of the human potential of our country, with devastating consequences for social and economic development.

The challenge we faced at the dawn of a democratic society was to create an education and training system in and through which all our people would be able to develop their potential to the full.

Palestinians still face a similar situation not only in education but also in other key areas of life.

Almost 5 million live under a fifty-year old military occupation.

Another 1.7 million are Palestinian citizens of Israel and are a minority under pressure like black people were under apartheid. They are poorer than their Jewish neighbours and suffer discrimination like black people did under apartheid.

However, they live better lives than Palestinians in IGaza and the West Bank.

The reality is that Palestinians, promised a fifth of the land as part of the Oslo accords, control a little more than a tenth of historic Palestine.

That's the reality.

The current human catastrophe in the Middle East has pushed the Palestinian question off the global radar. But it will return.

To end a hundred years of conflict both sides to reach an understanding that neither can prevail through violence.

Peace can be built only by sharing the land.

As President Abbas has said: "We will reaffirm our recognition of the State of Israel living side by side with the State of Palestine in peace and security. I am asking Netanyahu to sit with me at the table and negotiate. I do not have any preconditions. We only want a temporary building stop in the settlements while these talks are taking place. The Israelis are telling us it is not the right time for a two-state solution. But when is this moment? The right time is now and not

tomorrow or any time in the future. We want to coexist with them. But the Israelis don't want that. They want to separate themselves from us and prefer not to see us.” (Spiegel)

Palestinians have endorsed the two-state solution for 30 years now but they fear that as time goes on it becomes less and less likely. As Abbas says: ‘As long as the state of Israel continues to be celebrated and rewarded, rather than held accountable to universal standards for its continued violations of international law, it will have no incentive to end the occupation.’ (Guardian)

Recognizing the terrible plight of the people of Palestine is not sufficient for their rightful expectation that they too must enjoy freedom and human rights.

Organizing ourselves to represent the people of Palestine and advocating action against Israel is also not sufficient. Up to now much of the brave efforts have not resulted in freedom for Palestine. Thus there is possibly a need to refresh the form of organisation strategy and engagement.

Our experience in South Africa's struggle against apartheid was that a multi-pronged strategy is vitally necessary - internal, international, sectoral, mass-based and the seeking out of those within the oppressive country who are engaged and supportive of change.

Finally, the failure to make progress may mean we need to identify powerful members of the global community who may give greater impetus to progress in finding a two-state solution, perhaps the BRICS countries should be called on to assume such global leadership. It is intolerable for the condition of total human insecurity in Palestine to be allowed to persist.

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