

FREEDOM - JUSTICE – EQUALITY

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Open Letter

Minister Naledi Pandor

Department of International Relations and Cooperation

Pretoria

10th May 2021

Dear Minister Pandor,

The SA BDS Coalition is extremely disappointed by the media statement issued by DIRCO on 8th May 2021.

The title of the DIRCO statement: "Clashes between Israelis and Palestinians at Al-Aqsa Mosque" is factually incorrect. There were no 'clashes'. What occurred was Israeli aggression and provocation! It is imperative not to conflate this as a 'clash between two parties'. On Friday 7th May Israeli occupation forces stormed Al Aqsa mosque where thousands of Palestinians had gathered for prayers marking the final week of Ramadan. The Israeli forces fired rubber bullets, set off sound bombs and sprayed tear gas into the mosque leaving over 200 Palestinians injured. People were trapped inside the mosque compound for hours as police and soldiers surrounded it and emergency services were prevented from reaching the injured.

In its statement, it is unacceptable for DIRCO to refer to a "peace process" which has been dead for over two decades. During this time Israel has continued to build and expand settlements across Palestine rendering the notion of a contiguous sovereign Palestinian state an impossibility. It is clear that Israel, the colonial power, is now in the process of ethnically cleansing Palestinians from East Jerusalem. In the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, Israeli settlers, who are illegal under international law yet are protected by Israeli soldiers, have been throwing Palestinians and their possessions out of homes they have lived in for generations. Illegal settlers and Israeli forces have escalated their attacks in Jerusalem today and we are reminded of your statement to the UN Security Council (UNSC) in October 2019: "Clearly there is no intention to seek or achieve peace by those implementing these actions. "

It is incomprehensible that an ANC government cannot clearly state that Israel practices apartheid. In 2009 the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa released a 300-page study that comprehensively showed that Israel is practising occupation, colonialism and apartheid. The HSRC commissioned an international team of scholars and practitioners of international public law from South Africa, the United Kingdom, Israel and the West Bank to conduct the study. It represented 15 months of exhaustive research. The project was suggested by the January 2007 report by eminent South African jurist John Dugard, in his capacity as Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Human Rights Council, when he indicated that Israeli practices had assumed characteristics of colonialism and apartheid.

Eminent Palestinian rights organisations such as Badil, Al Haq, Adalah, and Stop the Wall have pointed out Israel practices persecution and apartheid. UN reports from the Economic and Social Council for Western Asia, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as well as UN Special Rapporteurs, and international legal experts have repeatedly made this point. Even B'Tselem, the largest Israeli human rights organization, came out clearly against Israeli apartheid earlier this year.

The UN Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid defines this crime against humanity as “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.” It is extremely significant that Human Rights Watch, a globally respected NGO, published a report two weeks ago that examines concretely how Israel fits this definition. We welcome the fact that South Africa will be signing the Apartheid Convention. Although it has taken 27 years to finally do so, let us now use this as an opportunity to call out Israeli apartheid.

The South African government must face up to the current reality. There are not two equal sides in conflict and there is no peace process. Israel is a settler-colonial state that systematically discriminates against and persecutes the indigenous Palestinian population committing crimes against humanity.

The world looks to South Africa to raise its voice loudly against Israeli apartheid brutality given our historic victory over the vile apartheid regime in our country. We take to heart your words at the UNSC (October 2019): "Let us remember that while debate is important, we lose credibility as an institution when words are not accompanied by action. The people of Palestine require action." We therefore request a meeting with you and relevant officials in your department to discuss how we can collectively take action towards establishing a UN global envoy for crimes of apartheid; a UN commission of enquiry to investigate systematic discrimination and repression in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT); an international commission of inquiry to investigate systematic discrimination and repression based on group identity in the OPT and Israel; imposing sanctions, an arms embargo and severing diplomatic, trade and all bilateral ties with apartheid Israel.

We are sure you agree that South Africa has an historic, political and moral imperative to stand firmly with the resistance of the Palestinian people as the international community did during our struggle. In the words of our first President, Nelson Mandela: “we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians”.

On behalf of the National Committee of the South African BDS Coalition, affiliated to the Palestinian BDS National Committee

