

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**May 23, 2013**



Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes contains articles highlighting settlement activity, the relationship between Christian churches and the government in Israel, comments on Stephen Hawking's decision not to attend the Israeli Presidential Conference, challenges to the two-state solution, accusations of Israeli apartheid, persistent memories of the Nakba, and other items of interest.

- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin for May 10 give background on settlement freeze with hopes of negotiations, and civilian casualties in the Israeli Gaza operation.
- Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) News contains articles about the relationship between Christian churches and the Israeli government.
- Jonathan Lis in Ha'aretz reports that a senior Shas figure urged Netanyahu to adopt Arab League peace initiative and called for a for "bridge of understanding" between Islam and Judaism, and for Israeli aid to Palestinian refugees.
- Ron Gerlitz writes in +972 that the time has come for Israelis to allow themselves to see their country not only as the battleground of a national struggle but as a shared homeland, which with painful concessions and tremendous confidence-building efforts on both sides, could be turned into a good place where all children will want to live.
- Carlo Strenger has written an open letter in Ha'aretz to Stephen Hawking stating that by deciding not to attend the Israeli Presidential Conference, he is singling out Israel and denying it has been under existential threat for most of its existence.
- Larry Derfner in an article in +972 defends the position of Prof. Hawking; he writes that if Israel ends its long tyranny over the Palestinians, such conscientious boycotts will be remembered as having been a gift.
- The Israeli News published a UN report stating that the Israeli occupation of east Jerusalem is driving its Palestinian residents into deeper economic isolation and that they face far greater poverty than Jewish neighbors.
- Rabbi Michael Lerner comments on an article by Uri Avnery in which Avnery challenges those who repeat the mantra that "the two state solution is dead."
- Cecilie Surasky of Jewish Voice for Peace reports about the backlash to San Francisco bus ads that condemn Israeli apartheid.
- Roger Cohen in the New York Times writes of his interview with Salem Fayyad who speaks of the Palestinian story of being one of failed leadership. He describes Fatah's leaders as casual, lacking seriousness or strategy, hostage to their own rhetoric.
- Haggai Matar records in +972 that dozens of Tel Aviv municipal officers, border policemen and private movers raided several businesses run by African asylum seekers around Tel Aviv's central bus station, confiscating goods and welding the doors shut.
- Ori Nir writes in Americans for Peace Now that the occupation has become routine for Israelis who express no shock at a TV report of pre-dawn arrests of Palestinian children – rock-throwing suspects – at a West Bank Palestinian refugee camp.
- Noam Sheizaf notes in +972 that the Israeli Right has been waging a war on history in recent years, using extreme measures to remove evidence of the Nakba from the national discourse, but that the Nakba's memory is more present than ever in Israel.

## [1\) Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Bulletin, May 10, 2013](#)

**Settlement freeze to warm up negotiations?** Early this week, word got out that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quietly ordered a freeze delaying the construction of hundreds of homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The initial report by Israel's Army Radio cited Knesset member Ayelet Shaked of the settlers' Jewish Home party saying that "the new contracts that have been readied require the prime minister's signature, and for some reason it is not happening."

The reason stems from U.S. President Barack Obama's recent diplomatic push in the region after his trip in March and several follow-up meetings between Secretary of State John Kerry and Israeli, Palestinian, and other Arab leaders. In the wake of these efforts and with the recent Arab League announcement about renewing the Arab Peace Initiative, the Israeli prime minister has seen pressure from the international community to not advance settlement projects.

Ha'aretz, quoting unidentified Israeli officials, reports that Netanyahu promised Kerry that he would refrain from issuing new tenders in the West Bank and East Jerusalem until mid-June to give the diplomatic efforts a chance. Palestinian officials say they froze their activities against Israel in international agencies for eight weeks to see how Kerry's efforts go.

According to anti-settlement watch dog group Peace Now: "During the interim period between the [Israeli] elections in January and establishment of the new government in March, Peace Now exposed the advancement of plans for 1,506 new housing units in settlements. Many of these plans are for isolated areas... However, since the visit of President Obama, it seems that Netanyahu took it upon himself to follow a policy of restraint. This is likely to avoid the blame for destroying Secretary Kerry's efforts to launch a political process."

Peace Now colleague Lara Friedman says that this "restraint" is "categorically not" a freeze since there has been no slowing of the construction that was already under way. She writes, "As Peace Now has documented, settlement construction in the West Bank continues apace—as in, at the same fast clip as before the Obama visit. How is this possible? Because Netanyahu and his previous government went on a settlement binge in the period before the Obama visit" during the interim period.

Netanyahu's government laid rumors of a freeze to rest on [May 9] when Israel's civil administration approved 296 new housing units in the Beit El settlement near Ramallah. Peace Now reports that the area would not be annexed to Israel under most peace agreement proposals.

Secretary Kerry is intensifying his efforts. On [May 8] he met with Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni in Rome, whom he had met with in Israel less than a week before. She says Kerry "is completely involved, determined" to restart negotiations. Kerry will also meet with Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh while in Italy. Jordan has "played a key role in facilitating contacts between Ramallah and Jerusalem."

**Over half of Palestinian fatalities civilian in Operation Pillar of Defense:** B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights group, released a report ... regarding fatalities from Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza, the Israeli military operation that took place from November 14-21, 2012. B'Tselem's report is incongruous with Israeli public opinion that the operation resulted in few Palestinian civilian casualties. [The] investigation reports that 167 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli military during the operation. This includes 62 Palestinians who took part in the hostilities and seven other who were targets of assassination. From the remaining fatalities, 87 did not take part in the hostilities. With regard to 11 other fatalities, B'Tselem could not determine if they had taken part in the hostilities. Additionally, the proportion of how many Palestinian civilians (17) to Palestinians who took part in the hostilities (26) that were killed by Israel in the first four days is practically reversed in the last four days (70 civilians, 36 participants in attacks). ...

[Read the entire Bulletin at CMEP's website.](#)

## 2) Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) News

Following are links to articles appearing on the [HCEF website](#):

- [Pope Francis urged to ask Israel to stop the construction of the Separation Wall in Bethlehem](#)
- [Christian Voice of Jerusalem appeals to kidnappers for the release \[of\] bishops of Aleppo](#)
- [Muslim body urges release of captive Syrian bishops](#)
- [Silence still shrouds kidnapped Orthodox prelates. Bishop of Aleppo: We're groping in the dark](#)
- [Palestinian Christians struggle with Israeli occupation](#)
- [Latin Patriarch's Easter greetings to the Orthodox churches](#)
- [Vatican under scrutiny as nuns, landowners lose Israel wall challenge](#)

### ***A statement from the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, concerning the Israeli police measures on [Orthodox] Holy Saturday, May 2013***

We, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, watched with sorrowful hearts the horrific scenes of the brutal treatment of our clergy, people, and pilgrims in the Old City of Jerusalem during [Orthodox] Holy Saturday {May 4}. A day of joy and celebration was turned to great sorrow and pain for some of our faithful because they were ill-treated by some Israeli policemen who were present around the gates of the Old City and passages that lead to the Holy Sepulcher.

We understand the necessity and the importance of the presence of security forces to ensure order and stability, and for organizing the celebration of the Holy Fire at the Church of the Resurrection. Yet, it is not acceptable that under pretext of security and order, our clergy and people are indiscriminately and brutally beaten, and prevented from entering their churches, monasteries and convents.

We urge the Israeli authorities especially the Ministry of Interior and the police department in Jerusalem, to seriously consider our complaints, to hold responsibility and to condemn all acts of violence against our faithful and the clergy who were ill-treated by the police. We deplore that every year, the police measures are becoming tougher, and we expect that these accidents will not be repeated and the police should be more sensitive and respectful if they seek to protect and serve. We also denounce all those who are blaming the churches and holding them responsible of the Israeli measures during Holy Week celebrations. On the contrary, the Heads of churches in Jerusalem condemn all of these measures and violations of Christians' rights to worship in their churches and Holy Sites. Therefore, we condemn all measures of closing the Old City and urge the Israeli authorities to allow full access to the Holy sites during Holy Week of both Church Calendars.

The Heads of Churches of Jerusalem

- +Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Patriarch Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarchate
- +Patriarch Norhan Manougian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land
- +Archbishop Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem
- +Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Aba Fissiha Tsion, Locum Tenens of the Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Archbishop Joseph-Jules Zerey, Greek-Melkite-Catholic Patriarchate
- +Archbishop Moussa El-Hage, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate
- +Bishop Suheil Dawani, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East
- +Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land
- +Bishop Pierre Melki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate
- +Msgr. Joseph Antoine Kelekian, Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

### **3) Senior Shas figure urges Netanyahu to adopt Arab League peace initiative**

**Jonathan Lis, Ha'aretz, May 8, 2013**

The reprise of Aryeh Deri as the chairman of Shas has brought with it a signal that the ultra-Orthodox party has softened its stance on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, in the form of a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from [Knesset member] Yitzhak Cohen on [May 6] urging the government to adopt the Arab League peace initiative.

"I beseech you to leave no stone unturned and to examine the feasibility of the peace initiative in light of the fact that we live in a region that is almost completely Muslim, and out of the belief that the peace initiative contains the seeds to begin building a bridge of understanding between Islam and Judaism and the Jewish state," wrote Cohen, who has served in the cabinet almost continuously since 2000, most recently as deputy finance minister in the previous government.

Cohen called on Netanyahu to extend financial aid to Palestinian refugees and to translate the Arab League plan, which Arab leaders endorsed in April, into concrete measures that would help to rebuild neighboring Arab states.

The letter heralds the approach Shas intends to take in its new role as an opposition party, by challenging the government from the left and outflanking Habayit Hayehudi, which chose to join Netanyahu's coalition at the expense of the ultra-Orthodox parties.

"In my humble opinion and to my best judgment the peace initiative gives Israel something more precious than gold that cannot be obtained in bilateral negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. It grants - de facto - recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people.

Recognition that comes from the guardians of the holiest places in Islam (Mecca and Medina), backed by a firm majority of the 1.5 billion Muslims in the world" wrote Cohen, adding, "From a historical perspective it could be said that Christianity did not make such an offer to Judaism, until the Holocaust."

Cohen also suggested, in his letter, that Netanyahu should introduce "a regional Marshall Plan" to resettle the Palestinians living in refugee camps "wherever they are situated" to "enable the rehabilitation of the surrounding states."

A political figure who is familiar with internal affairs within Shas said on Monday, "It is doubtful such statements would have been made by party MKs in the era of [former Shas chairman] Eli Yishai. Cohen is regarded as relatively moderate, but we can guess this letter would not have been sent without at least the tacit consent of Deri."

### **4) Land, my land: One issue that can be resolved**

**Ron Gerlitz, +972, May 6, 2013**

As Israel's Jewish citizens celebrated the Passover holiday last month, its Arab citizens commemorated Land Day. Land Day is a commemoration of the death of six Arab demonstrators in 1976 while protesting massive government land expropriations in the Galilee for the purpose of building new Jewish communities. It has also become a day of protest against discrimination and inequality.

Coverage of Land Day events in Israel's Hebrew-language media was very limited and reported only on the demonstrations; it ignored the content of the day and the demands being made by Arab citizens. This seems to attest to the Jewish majority's reluctance to make a genuine effort at dealing forthrightly with Arab citizens on land issues.

Almost 40 years after the Land Day events, an examination of government policy toward Arab citizens reveals a complex picture. Alongside prolonged and systematic discrimination that encompasses almost all aspects of state allocations, there has also been a positive trend that includes a government effort to close gaps between the Jewish and Arab sectors in certain areas. This effort has been translated into government programs that have led to somewhat of an improvement in Arab citizens' socio-economic situation. The pace of narrowing gaps is excruciatingly slow, but there is great potential in this positive trend.

But in one area, the state has demonstrated almost total refusal to bring about change, namely the land issue. It is important to recap the background: Immediately after the establishment of the state

in 1948 there was a massive expropriation of land belonging to internal refugees, who became landless citizens. Later on, until the 1970s, the state expropriated large amounts of land in order to develop Jewish communities.

Since 1948, the two groups' populations have grown at similar rates (eightfold to tenfold) but the government has built 700 (!) new communities for Jews (including new cities) and not a single community for Arabs (with the exception of a few permanent towns for the Bedouin who were evicted from their land in the Negev). Even today, a new city called Harish is being built in the heart of the Arab population in Wadi Ara (Nahal Iron) – for Jews only.

Land is a tangible resource, but also has a powerful dimension of consciousness. The Jewish community grew up on the words of poet Alexander Penn: "Land my land, merciful till death, a mighty wind roiled your ruins, I have wooed you in blood." On the other hand, in "Poem of the Land" Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote: "In the month of March we sprawl in the land and in the month of March the land propagates within us."

The poems and their narratives translate into viewpoints. A public opinion survey conducted by Sikkuy found that when it comes to land, a very small percentage of Arab citizens are willing to reach a compromise with the government (only 11 percent) compared to other areas where there is greater willingness: defining the Jewish character of the state (18 percent) and the obligation to perform national service (28 percent).

But the state has refused attempts by Arab citizens to resolve the land discrimination. And so, precisely on the issue that is most important to Arab citizens, and which for them constitutes an open wound, the government hunkers down and is not willing to compromise.

That is a bitter mistake. Equality and good relations between Arabs and Jews could be improved significantly by taking of a number of steps, such as: expanding the jurisdiction and boundaries of some of the Arab municipalities; keeping the government's promise and implementing the Supreme Court decision allowing the residents of Iqrit and Biram to return to their villages; promoting plans to build a new Arab city in the Galilee; establishing a number of Arab community settlements; and even considering returning land to some of the internal refugees.

I am not ignoring the fact that Israel is a small country in which it is preferable to promote protection of open spaces, the construction of high-rise buildings and certainly not building new communities. But you can't use open spaces for one nationality and remember the environment only when it comes to the other nationality.

Nor am I naive. The Arab-Jewish conflict is a conflict over land, and any action concerning land touches its most sensitive nerves. The Jewish majority is afraid that any such move would provide an opening for Arab "control" of the land, and undermine the interests of the Jewish public.

But the opposite is the case. The present situation is not only unjust, it also means leaving a barrel of gunpowder between Arabs and Jews in the heart of the public space we share. The Arab citizen who looks with a broken heart at the land that was confiscated from him and stands unused, is a wounded citizen. The national conflict over land should be resolved by making it a resource for all the state's citizens. Significant confidence-building steps that would change the situation, even if they are far from fulfilling Arab citizens' wishes, would constitute a basis and an opening for a historical reconciliation between Arabs and Jews in the country. It is precisely this sensitive issue that offers an opportunity for all of us.

This is a period in which Arab and Jewish citizens mark Passover, Land Day, Israel Independence Day and Nakba Day. During these days both nations are concerned with questions regarding their profound connection to the homeland. The time has come to allow ourselves to see this country not only as the battleground of a national struggle but as a shared homeland, which with painful concessions and tremendous confidence-building efforts on both sides, we can turn into a good place where our children will want to live. There is no other way, and we have no other country.

*The writer is the co-executive director of Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality.*

## 5) [Hypocrisy and double standard: An open letter to Stephen Hawking](#)

Carlo Strenger, Ha'aretz, May 8, 2013

Dear Professor Hawking,

There are many reasons why you are considered one of the world's leading scientists. As you know very well, one reason for your achievement is the ability to keep a mind of your own and to refuse caving in to pressure by the mainstream. Innovation is only possible if you are immune to such pressure.

Given my respect for your achievement I am surprised and saddened by your decision, reported today by The Guardian that you have cancelled your participation at this year's President's Conference in Jerusalem, and that you have joined those who call for an academic boycott of Israel. I would have expected a man of your standing and achievement not to be influenced by the pressure that was reportedly exerted on you to cancel your visit in Israel.

Let it first be said that I have been opposed to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories for many years, and that I have voiced this opposition with all means at my disposal. I think that Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank is indefensible morally, stupid politically and unwise strategically, and I will continue opposing it as long as I can.

This being said, I have always found it morally reprehensible and intellectually indefensible that many British academics have been calling for an academic boycott of Israel. This call is based on a moral double standard that I would not expect from a community whose mission it is to maintain intellectual integrity.

Yes, I think that Israel is guilty of human right violations in the West Bank. But these violations are negligible compared to those perpetrated by any number of states ranging from Iran through Russia to China, to mention only a small number of examples. Iran hangs hundreds of homosexuals every year; China has been occupying Tibet for decades, and you know of the terrible destruction Russia has inflicted in Chechnya. I have not heard from you or your colleagues who support an academic boycott against Israel that they boycott any of these countries.

But let me go one step further: Israel is accused of detaining Palestinians without trial for years. So is the USA, which, as you very well know, to this day has not closed Guantanamo Bay. Israel is accused of targeted killings of Palestinians suspected or known to be involved in terrorist acts. As is reported worldwide, the United States has been practicing targeted assassinations of terror suspects in many countries for years.

The question whether these detentions and targeted assassinations can be justified is weighty, and there are no simple answers. Personally I think that even in a war against terror democracies must make every conceivable effort to maintain the rule of law and avoid human rights violations. Yet let us not forget that both Israel and the United States are in difficult situations. Israel was on the verge of a peace agreement with the Palestinian people when the second Intifada broke out. Daily Israelis were shredded into pieces by suicide bombings, and it is very difficult for Israeli politicians to convince Israelis to take risks for peace. The U.S. is still reeling from the trauma of 9/11. It has occupied two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq for a decade since. I happen to think that it was wrong to attack Iraq, in the same way that I think that Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank is wrong.

Professor Hawking: how can you and your colleagues who argue for an academic boycott of Israel justify your double standard by singling out Israel? You are simply denying that Israel has been under existential threat for most of its existence. To this day Hamas, one of the two major parties in Palestine, calls for Israel's destruction, and its charter employs the vilest anti-Semitic language. To this day hardly a

week goes by in which Iran and its proxy Hezbollah do not threaten to obliterate Israel, even though they have no direct conflict with Israel about anything.

Singling Israel out for academic boycott is, I believe, a case of profound hypocrisy. It is a way to ventilate outrage about the world's injustices where the cost is low. I'm still waiting for the British academic who says he won't cooperate with American institutions as long as Guantanamo is open, or as long as the U.S. continues targeted assassinations.

In addition to the hypocrisy, singling out Israel's academia is pragmatically unwise, to put it mildly. Israel's academia is largely liberal in its outlook, and many academics here have opposed Israel's settlement policies for decades. But once again, British academics choose the easiest target to vent their rage in a way that does not contribute anything constructive to the Palestinian cause they support.

Israel, like any other country, can be criticized. But such criticism should not be based on shrill moralism and simplistic binary thinking – something I do not expect from academics. The real world is, unfortunately a messy, difficult place. Novelist Ian McEwan is quoted in the Guardian as saying that “If I only went to countries that I approve of, I probably would never get out of bed ... It's not great if everyone stops talking” when he was criticized for coming to Israel to receive the Jerusalem Prize for Literature in 2011.

He certainly has a point. Living up to the standards of human rights and the ideals of democracy in an imperfect world is difficult. Major thinkers like Philip Bobbitt and Michael Ignatieff have invested deep and comprehensive thought into the difficult topic of how to maintain the human rights standard in a world threatened by terrorism.

Professor Hawking, I would expect from a man of your intellectual stature to get involved in the difficult task of grappling with these questions. Taking the simple way out of singling out Israel by boycotting it academically does not behoove you intellectually or morally.

If your cancelation was indeed a function of pressures and not from health reasons, as stated by your university following The Guardian's report, I would respect it if you were to reconsider your decision and come to the President's Conference.

Sincerely, Carlo Strenger

**6) [A Zionist defense of Hawking](#)  
Larry Derfner, +972, May 9, 2013**

I would not join a BDS protest; I'm a “two-stater” who believes Israel should remain a Jewish state because the alternatives would be worse, who believes Israel's “original sin” is the occupation, not Zionism, and so I don't think I'd really feel at home at your average BDS demonstration. There seems to be way too much loathing for everything about Israel in the movement – which is not to say everyone in the movement thinks that way; I know that's not true. But the main thrust and tone of the BDS campaign is such that there's no way I can identify with it.

But when I read Wednesday that Stephen Hawking was boycotting the President's Conference, I was glad. He doesn't hate Israel; he's been here four times. In his letter canceling his participation, he wrote that he'd originally planned to come because “this would not only allow me to express my opinion on the prospects for a peace settlement but also because it would allow me to lecture on the West Bank. ... Had I attended, I would have stated my opinion that the policy of the present Israeli government is likely to lead to disaster.” What Hawking hates is the occupation, not Israel, and he believes that by striking a blow against Israel's rule over the Palestinians, he is helping not only the Palestinians but Israel as well. I think he's right, and what's more, I think he succeeded in a seismic way.

Israel and its advocates can wave off boycotts by some college students and left-wing professors, even by a few well-known pop musicians, but not by a giant and hero of the Western world like Hawking. What he's done is a threat to the status quo – and except for the potential that lies in the Palestinians' UN strategy, (specifically their plan to take the occupation to The Hague), Hawking's boycott is the only such threat that's appeared in a very, very long time.

I wish there were kinder, gentler ways than such acts of ostracism to get Israel to end its 46-year dictatorship over the Palestinians. Ideally, of course, the public would elect a government that would do it. Failing that, its best friend, America, would prod the public and its leaders with "tough love." Failing that, the Palestinians would rally the world against the occupation through diplomacy and nonviolent protest.

Like a lot of other people, I put my hope in one after another of the above tactics, and one after another, they have so far come to nothing. So, as they say, desperate times require desperate measures, and for the cause of Israeli justice and Palestinian freedom, that means ostracizing Israel, including by such means as boycotting the President's Conference.

At this point, at least, I can't lay down a precise rule on which means would be fair and which ones foul, but I know, for instance, that I would be sickened at the sight of a shopper in a foreign supermarket refusing to buy Bamba; that's pathological, that's treating Israel as if it's got the cooties. Likewise, I wouldn't want Hawking or anyone else to refuse to visit Israel privately. I loathe the idea of a hands-off policy toward everything and everybody Israeli.

But if Madonna were to announce that she won't play here again until the occupation is over, I would cheer. What I'm in favor of above all is a psychological campaign aimed at Israelis and their leaders – declarations by the democratic world, backed by action, that it will ostracize Israel until it stops denying the Palestinians their independence. That is the one thing that can succeed, the one thing that can scare Israelis into a radical change of course, and when a boycott can advance that goal without indulging in Israel-hatred – which the BDS campaign in the West has largely failed to do – then it's a good thing. Harsh medicine, but ultimately, excuse the expression, good for the Jews as well as the Palestinians.

The strongest argument against punishing Israel for the occupation, in any way, is that Israel shouldn't be singled out, that there are other countries doing much worse things than what we do to the Palestinians, so why not punish them? I have nothing against boycotting all sorts of countries, but the problem with that question is that it looks at a boycott of Israel, of any sort, as punishment and nothing else – and even while much of the BDS movement intends it that way, that is not necessarily the effect. A boycott is, of course, punishment, but if Israel learns the right lesson from it – that the occupation is wrong and must be ended – then it's a punishment that will save this country.

Again, if Israel would reverse the status quo of its own volition, through elections, or do it in response to pressure from its friends like the U.S. and European governments, then I'd oppose punishing it by any means. But the fact is that there's no rational hope of this happening; the right wing owns Israeli politics, while the U.S., European Union and the other democratic states, for a variety of reasons, won't force Israel's hand. The kinder, gentler ways haven't worked on this country, so it's either acts of ostracism or occupation forever, and given those two choices, I'd say Israel is best served by the former.

In retrospect, the sanctions on South Africa were a gift to that country. If Israel ends its long tyranny over the Palestinians, such conscientious boycotts as that of Stephen Hawking will be remembered for having been a gift to this one.



**7) [UN report: Israel strangles east Jerusalem's development](#)  
(Reuters) Israel News, May 9, 2013**

The Israeli occupation of east Jerusalem is driving its Palestinian residents into deeper economic isolation and they face far greater poverty than Jewish neighbors, said a UN report on the city at the heart of the Middle East conflict.

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report, published on Thursday, is the first comprehensive investigation into the east Jerusalem economy carried out by the United Nations.

It comes as U.S. President Barack Obama tries to revive peace talks stalled since 2010, and he has pledged an investment initiative to spur flagging Palestinian growth. UNCTAD said Israeli neglect was hindering development in east Jerusalem, which is isolated from neighboring Palestinian communities and not integrated into the broader Israeli economy.

The report said 77 percent of Jerusalem's non-Jewish households lived below the poverty line against 25 percent of Jewish families. Moreover, 84 percent of Palestinian children there live in poverty against 45 percent of Jewish children.

"Needless to say, if it were so inclined, the Israeli government could go much further in meeting its obligations as an occupying power by acting with vigor to improve the economic conditions in east Jerusalem and the well-being of its Palestinian residents," said the report. Jerusalem authorities did not immediately reply to requests for comment on the report.

*Economy shrunk by half*

Israel captured Jerusalem in 1967's Six Day War. For Israelis, it is their "eternal and indivisible" capital, lying at the center of Israel's national project to build a Jewish state. For Palestinians, there can be no peace deal until Israel cedes them control over at least part of the city, a symbol of their national struggle and home to Islam's third holiest site.

The UN report said Israeli curbs on the movement of people and goods from the neighboring occupied West Bank had strangled east Jerusalem's development. Israel says the restrictions, many of which were introduced during the last Palestinian uprising, are needed for security reasons. The UN report said they had caused the east Jerusalem economy to shrink by half in the last two decades relative to that of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

While the 1993 Oslo Peace accords gave Palestinians limited self-rule in the adjoining West Bank, Palestinians in Jerusalem are considered "permanent residents" of Israel. But while they make up roughly one third of the city's total population, just seven percent of municipal spending is reserved for mainly Arab east Jerusalem, the UN said.

"It's clear that 300,000 Palestinians in the city pay taxes but receive different services," main researcher Raja Khalidi said. "(Jerusalem) is perhaps legally united and politically united, but certainly not socio-economically united."

The report recommended that while a resolution to the conflict remains elusive, Palestinian investors and business leaders must take the lead in forming a development strategy. "I don't think focusing on the economy alone can work, but if there can be some relaxation of the political situation, then the economy might improve," Adnan Husseini, the Palestinians' governor of Jerusalem, told Reuters.

## **8) Two state solution is the only solution—says Uri Avnery, leader of the Israeli Peace Movement Gush Shalom**

Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of Tikkun magazine, comments on the following article by Uri Avnery:

*Uri Avnery, chair of Israel's peace movement Gush Shalom in Tel Aviv, challenges those lefties and righties who repeat the mantra that "the two state solution is dead." If only the "One State" solution is on the agenda, he points out, then all those Israelis who have been demonstrating against new settlements have no case whatsoever, since in a one state solution both Israelis and Palestinians should be able to build anyplace they want within that state and settlement construction should be viewed as a step in that direction! He seems to be saying to peace people: you can't have it both ways--if you want one state then you have no good grounds to oppose Jews building wherever they want in that supposedly emerging one state. I have one disagreement with Avnery's piece below: I think if Palestinians and peaceniks around the world were to embrace one state and switch their demands to a simple one: "One person one vote throughout Israel/Palestine" this prospect might seem so overwhelmingly scary to Israelis that it would create the political pressure inside Israel to seriously negotiate a two state solution. It might be that asking for one state is the only way Palestinians will get a two state solution. Just a possibility to consider.*

### **The Donkey of the Messiah**

**Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, May 11, 2013**

"The two-state solution is dead!" This mantra has been repeated so often lately, by so many authoritative commentators, that it must be true. Well, it ain't. It reminds one of Mark Twain's oft quoted words: "The report of my death was an exaggeration."

By now this has become an intellectual fad. To advocate the two-state solution means that you are ancient, old-fashioned, stale, stodgy, a fossil from a bygone era. Hoisting the flag of the "one-state solution" means that you are young, forward-looking, "cool."

Actually, this only shows how ideas move in circles. When we declared in early 1949, just after the end of the first Israeli-Arab war, that the only answer to the new situation was the establishment of a Palestinian state side by side with Israel, the "one-state solution" was already old.

The idea of a "bi-national state" was in vogue in the 1930s. Its main advocates were well-meaning intellectuals, many of them luminaries of the new Hebrew University, like Judah Leon Magnes and Martin Buber. They were reinforced by the Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz movement, which later became the Mapam party.

It never gained any traction. The Arabs believed that it was a Jewish trick. Bi-nationalism was built on the principle of parity between the two populations in Palestine – 50 percent Jews, 50 percent Arabs. Since the Jews at that time were much less than half the population, Arab suspicions were reasonable.

On the Jewish side, the idea looked ridiculous. The very essence of Zionism was to have a state where Jews would be masters of their fate, preferably in all of Palestine. At the time, no one called it the "one-state solution" because there was already one state – the State of Palestine, ruled by the British. The "solution" was called "the bi-national state" and died, unmourned, in the war of 1948.

What has caused the miraculous resurrection of this idea? ...

[Read the entire piece on Tikkun's website.](#)

**9) San Francisco bus ads condemn Israeli apartheid; backlash begins**  
**Cecilie Surasky, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), May 12, 2013**

*The following was posted on "Muzzle Watch, Tracking efforts to stifle open debate about U.S.-Israeli foreign policy," a JVP website.*

American Muslims for Palestine launched an ad campaign this week on San Francisco buses condemning Israeli apartheid. ([See ad on Muzzle Watch.](#)) Predictably, local branches of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the American Jewish Committee (AJC), as well as the Jewish Community Relations Council, immediately issued a statement in effect calling the ad hate speech for using the word "apartheid." They have called on "all civic, ethnic and religious leaders who oppose bigoted lies and demonization to exercise their constitutional rights by condemning these inflammatory advertisements." ...

First, it's hard to know if the people who wrote this press release actually believe what they wrote. The points they make against the ad are so off the mark, and often offensive, it's hard to believe anyone could write them sincerely. (I'm deleting the names on the release because I don't think it's fair to blame them. I think people at the top should be held accountable for such nonsense.)

Local offices of the ADL and the AJC are not synonymous with the "Bay Area Jewish Community." In fact, while the Jewish Community Relations Council claims to represent Bay Area Jews, they won't release the number or names of groups they represent. That certainly makes one wonder if the number is embarrassingly small. And it's likely shrinking. There is no shortage of Jews around here, from a wide political spectrum, who would be appalled to be associated with an attack on a Muslim group for using a word that Israeli officials use regularly. (More on that later.)

*Back to the press release: Today, another misleading advertisement appeared in San Francisco targeting one segment of our community in an attempt to sow division in our city. The Bay Area's organized Jewish community strongly condemns the ad's deceitful claim that Israel is an apartheid state. Placed by American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), the ad is morally reprehensible as it employs inflammatory rhetoric designed to delegitimize Israel's very existence.*

First we see the predictable talking point about initiatives that seek to pressure Israel to abide by international law seeking to "divide the community." The irony of course, is that actually the community is pretty united, certainly increasingly so. On campuses, for example, over and over again you have a veritable rainbow of organizations backing these initiatives – including Christian, Jewish, Muslim, secular, Southeast Asian, Latino, African American and so forth, all united-increasingly opposed to "coalitions" of a handful of similar and non-diverse groups. (Kind of like those UN votes for Palestinian rights where nearly every country in the world stands on one side, and Israel, the U.S., Palau and Micronesia stand on the other.)

This is the gist—the JCRC and ADL claim the ad is essentially a hate crime designed to delegitimize Israel's existence. This is the de facto talking point these days; it is intimidating language, used for lack of a good argument. It goes like this: Q "Isn't the occupation wrong?" A "You want to destroy Israel!" Q "Doesn't it seem unfair that 93 percent of the land in Israel is reserved for Jews only-what about the 25 percent of non-Jews?" A "You want to destroy Israel!"

It doesn't really matter what you say or do, the answer always is, "you REALLY want to destroy Israel" (or delegitimize it, which is supposed to be a roundabout way to destroy Israel). Dig a little deeper, and according to the six million dollar Israel Action Network, which openly spies on groups like Jewish Voice for Peace\* and provides talking points and strategy to defenders of Israeli government policy, the aim of delegitimization is to "isolate Israel as a pariah state and reject the notion of a two-state solution." ...

**[Read the entire piece at Muzzle Watch.](#)**

**10) Fayyad steps down, not out**  
**Roger Cohen, New York Times, May 3, 2013**

*The following column, originally published by the New York Times, was reprinted on the Jews for Justice for Palestinians' website.*

The streets of the Palestinian capital in the West Bank are quiet on a Saturday, but Salam Fayyad, who quit as prime minister three weeks ago, is still in his office, dapper as ever in suit and tie — unable to carry on and yet, it seems, not permitted to go. His limbo is a reflection of Palestinian paralysis and disarray.

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president with whom Fayyad feuded, knows that he needs his outgoing prime minister's rigorous competence. He needs Fayyad's standing with the United States and Europe, major sources of funding for the beleaguered Palestinian Authority. He needs Fayyad's grip on security.

Yet the Fatah old guard with their sweet deals wants Fayyad gone; Hamas hates him as a supposed American stooge, and Abbas has tired of this U.S.-educated "turbulent priest." So the president hesitates. He mumbles about a "unity government" with Hamas. He does little. And Fayyad is at his desk when he might be eating sweet pastries with his family.

"Our story is a story of failed leadership, from way early on," Fayyad tells me. "It is incredible that the fate of the Palestinian people has been in the hands of leaders so entirely casual, so guided by spur-of-the-moment decisions, without seriousness. We don't strategize, we cut deals in a tactical way and we hold ourselves hostage to our own rhetoric."

Fayyad first handed in his resignation on Feb. 23. Abbas demurred. President Obama, citing Fayyad's high reputation with the U.S. Congress and in the region, asked him to stay during a "businesslike" one-on-one meeting (their first) in March. Secretary of State John Kerry followed up with three or four phone calls. To no avail: Fayyad, after almost six years in the job, had had enough of the dance that leads nowhere, the "peace process" that is a mockery of those unhappily twinned words. On April 13 he resigned.

His was a revolution: Of acts over narrative, of state-building over slogans, of pragmatism over posturing. His core thought was simple: "If you look like a state and act like a state nobody in the end is going to deny you that state." Such was the institutional transformation that the World Bank declared Palestine ready for statehood. As Fayyad says, "We took the exam and passed."

But the acting prime minister hit a wall. It had two elements: Palestinian division and Israeli intransigence. Which undercut him more? They were both devastating. Of course, they also fed on each other. American dithering did not help.

Fatah, the major political movement in the West Bank, is a revolutionary party that has exhausted itself; ossified and murky, lacking a popular mandate or a strategy to deliver statehood, headed by a 78-year-old man, Abbas, who did not have the courage to embrace the political program of an outsider, Fayyad, even though that program delivered growth, accountability and security.

Abbas, Moscow-educated, and Fayyad, Texas-educated, never overcame the cultural gulf those educations bequeathed. The can-do approach did not figure in the Soviet curriculum. Abbas declined to leverage Fayyad's achievements. He refused to use Fayyad's probity and work ethic as transformative examples. Theirs was a rocky marriage of convenience. Fayyad reckons the party spent more time worrying about what he was doing than solving anything. ...

[Read the entire piece on the JFJP website.](#)

## **11) Municipal authorities raid and shutter asylum seekers' businesses in Tel Aviv**

**Haggai Matar, +972, May 13, 2013**

A group of municipal officials led an operation to close African asylum seekers' illegal businesses in the south Tel Aviv neighborhoods of Neve Sha'an and Shapira at around 7 p.m. [on May 12]. The municipal officers were accompanied by Border Police officers, a photographer and several large moving trucks complete with African workers.

Splitting into groups, the law enforcers went to several bars, restaurants and grocery stores owned by asylum seekers. As their legal status in Israel forbids them from either working or owning a business, most Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers are forced to make a living illegally, which leads authorities to chase them down and either punish their employers or close down their shops.

Such was the case [on May 12]. All the goods, furniture and other equipment in all the businesses were inventoried and confiscated, and the doors were welded shut. In none of the locations photographer Oren Ziv and I visited was there any resistance by the shop owners and the armed policemen (and one police attack dog) were left without much to do. Several Israeli bystanders cheered the officials for helping pushing foreigners out, while other muttered insults at them for enforcing racist policies.

Estimates have it that asylum seekers are running hundreds of small businesses in south Tel Aviv, mostly serving their own communities and naturally, authorities cannot possibly close them all down. However, owners often complain about police brutality, as Border Police patrols force people out of bars at midnight, at times using batons and even pepper spray. The municipality, too, is working hard at combating this small world of business and leisure, but operations on today's scale are not a common sight.

It is possible that Mayor Ron Huldai's administration pushed the operation forward as part of preparations for the upcoming October municipal elections. Many Israeli residents of south Tel Aviv are likely to be supportive of such actions, as the feeling is that asylum seekers are burdening the already weak physical and social infrastructure and poor services provided to the mostly working or lower-middle class population in the neighborhoods. This feeling is strengthened as some asylum seekers are pushed into criminal activities and the press gives extensive coverage to the criminality. Tensions between the communities has already led to several individual and mob attacks on asylum seekers by Israelis.

UPDATE, May 13, 10:30 a.m.:

Aladin Abaker, a Sudanese refugee, published pictures from Sunday night's raid showing Ministry of Health inspectors pouring bleach into pots of food in a restaurant, allegedly because the establishment is "a danger to public health." He writes the following:

*Friends meet in this place, the most delicious restaurant with a smell of home, to eat and remember our families in Darfur. Suddenly health inspectors and police forces swarmed in and destroyed the food we had ordered and the food in the pots, with no sensitivity to the people whose culture sees food as a sacred thing to be treated with respect. We tried to tell them that this place has been open for four years now, it's where we eat all our meals, and not once has anyone gone ill. Even whites come to eat here...*

*Everybody present was in tears. The waitress told us: "I've seen some horrible things in my life, including torture in Sinai, but this has humiliated me more than torture." I told her they were doing it to make our lives miserable and try to encourage us to return to Africa "willingly."*

## **12) Stop ignoring how routine the Occupation has become**

**Ori Nir, Americans for Peace Now, May 14, 2013**

Israel TV Channel 2 recently ran a lengthy report of pre-dawn arrests of Palestinian children -- rock-throwing suspects -- at a West Bank Palestinian refugee camp. The TV crew was embedded with an Israeli unit that raided the camp.

No, there was no blood, no violent confrontations and no big drama. Everything was done routinely, efficiently, as if scripted. Including the polite soldiers ("please get dressed") and the business-as-usual reactions of tweens who moments ago were in bed and are now handcuffed and blindfolded, in a military jeep. One of them, a boy named Ahmad who seemed around 10, tried to negotiate. "Tomorrow I have an exam. I will be thrown out of school if I don't take the test," he tried to reason with the soldiers. "Had you come any other day, I would have gone with you. Please!" Then he manned up and joined the soldiers.

So what's new? What's the big deal, my wife asked me when I told her about the report. That's exactly the point, I replied. The big deal is that there is nothing new, that this routine has been going on for 46 years. My wife and I, both former reporters, reminisced about covering such night raids together, more than 26 years ago.

Next month, Israelis and Palestinians will mark the 46th anniversary of the occupation. Think about it: For almost half a century, Israeli kids in their late teens have been arresting Palestinian kids in their early teens. Night in, night out, year after year. Guilty or not, justified or not, due process or not -- these are not really the questions.

What bothers so many Palestinians and Israelis -- among them the six former Israeli General Security Service chiefs who were interviewed for the award-winning documentary "The Gatekeepers" -- is how routine it has all become. Israelis and Palestinians live with the perpetuation of the anomaly that the occupation is.

Consider this: Only seven percent of Palestinians and 19 percent of Israelis are over the age of 55. That means that a small minority of both populations remembers life without occupation. Only a sliver of the Palestinian public has any recollection of not living under a foreign military occupation. For Palestinians, resisting the occupation -- the only reality they know -- is a way of life. For Israelis, oppressing the Palestinians is perceived at best as necessary evil. And so they both live with the banality of this anomaly.

Nissim Levi, a 20-year veteran of the Israeli GSS, several years ago described the impact of this routine. You go to a Palestinian village to arrest a suspect named Muhammed, he told Israel's Ha'aretz newspaper. "From the moment you leave for the village, to take the man and go, you create four more potential terrorists. ... You are entering a small room, in which five people are sleeping, and in order to get to my Muhammed, I need to step on four people." He continued: "On the way to enter the village to arrest someone, I already created damage."

How much damage? According to estimates by the Palestinian Authority's Bureau of Statistics, Israel has made more than 800,000 arrests of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza since 1967. That is an average of almost 50 arrests per day. Go calculate the damage.

Israelis and Palestinians know that their relationship is not normal. They should be shown, however, that it could be different, that things can change. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry are now trying to launch a process that would do just that. They deserve our support.

*This article originally appeared in the Chicago Tribune on May 14, 2013.*

### **13) Despite efforts to erase it, the Nakba's memory is more present than ever in Israel**

**Noam Sheizaf, +972, May 17, 2013**

Yedioth Hakibbutz is the weekly magazine of the United Kibbutz Movement. It is delivered every week to hundreds of Kibbutzim as part of the weekend edition of Yedioth Ahronoth, the bestselling paper in Israel. Even at a time of diminishing political influence – there is not a single representative of the United Kibbutz Movement in the current Knesset – the Kibbutzim remain both a symbol and a stronghold of conservative Zionism, and the mainstream tone of Yedioth suits them well.

Three months ago, there was an unusual story on the cover of Yedioth Hakibbutz. The front page read: “We expelled, blew up and killed.” Inside the magazine was a three-page interview with Kibbutz Degania member Yerachmiel Kahanovich, a former fighter in the Palmach (the Jewish underground that preceded the IDF), in which Kahanovic confessed to his part in the expulsion and murder of Palestinians during the war of 1948.

Several months earlier, Kahanovich was interviewed as part of a project by Zochrot (“remembering”), a non-profit that deals with the Nakba from an Israeli perspective (an English translation of his testimony can be found here), and his testimony drew the attention of Yedioth reporters. Zochrot exists mostly in the margins of the Israeli discourse. Getting such a follow-up in the Kibbutz magazine was unique but not unheard of: in October 2012 the same paper ran a story on a Nakba tour book published by Zochrot.

Kahanovich’s testimony touched on one of the most awful events of 1948 – the intentional murder of Palestinian civilians who sought refuge from the fighting inside the Dahamsh Mosque in Lod. He also confessed that he had been ordered to shoot each Palestinian who tried to escape the procession of refugees marching out of the region. At time he sounded regretful – but he also felt that, “we had no choice.”

**Q: Did you let the [Palestinians] residents get away?** YK: At first, yes. The intention was to expel them, these were the orders of the bosses, Yigal Alon and Yitzhak Sadeh. Sometimes we had to shoot one or two, and then the rest got the message and left on their own. You need to understand: if you didn’t destroy the Arab’s home, he will always want to come back. When there is no home, no village, there is nowhere to return.

**Q: Do you remember the battle for Lod and Ramleh?** YK: I don’t like to remember this so much... we shot shells into a mosque where many people were hiding. There was no choice.

**Q: We shot?** YK: I shot with the PIAT [anti-tank weapon]. It has an enormous shock wave.

**Q: And what were the results?** YK: Not pretty. They were all scattered on the walls.

**Q: How many?** YK: I don’t know. Many. I didn’t count. I opened the door, saw what I saw, and closed [it].

**Q: What did you feel?** YK: What can you feel after a thing like that? But if we didn’t do it, we might have been fighting to this very day. Then I stood with the Browning [machine gun] over the creek through which the remaining residents escaped. Anyone who strayed off track, got a shot.

**Q: From you as well?** YK: From me too. I felt really bad but I was a good marksman, and there were times when they only asked me to fire a single bullet. At the village next to Ramleh, two shots were enough. In 45 minutes the village was empty. They got the message.

The Lod-Ramleh region was one of places where a massive, intentional expulsion of the Palestinian population took place. Controversies surround the departure of Palestinians from other areas; whether they were forced to leave or whether they escaped on their own. It’s not that important. The Israeli decision not to allow refugees to return to their homes – sometimes as early as two weeks after they fled or were forced to leave – is what made them refugees. Later came the confiscation of the entirety of “unclaimed” Palestinian property, which leaves no doubt about what happened in 1948. Intentional or not, this was ethnic cleansing.