

# Palestine at the crossroads

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The outbreak of fratricidal violence between armed factions of Hamas and Fatah in the Gaza Strip in June, 2007, which has spelt the end of the short-lived Government of National Unity, was not unexpected. The rivalry between these factions degenerated into spasmodic clashes following the victory of Hamas in the Legislative Elections of January 2006. Hamas won 74 seats and Fatah 45 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. This effectively created two rival centres of power with Fatah's candidate, Mahmoud Abbas, having been elected President of the Palestine Authority in 2005.

Many believed the election defeat in 2006 was a vote against the perceived corruption of Fatah leaders and officials. Many Palestinians, however, voted for Hamas because of its greater militancy in refusing to bow to Israeli coercion.

USA and Israeli reaction following these results, aimed to isolate the Hamas-led Government, and create conditions for failure. Palestinian customs revenue was withheld by Israel while the EU and USA implemented punitive financial and economic measures. Israel continued military incursions into the Gaza and West Bank killing civilians, demolishing homes, arresting activists and 43 Hamas members of the legislative council, including ten ministers, the deputy prime minister and parliamentary speaker.

The Palestinian people, suffering under 40 years of Israeli military occupation and deteriorating humanitarian conditions were collectively punished for exercising their democratic vote.

It has been widely reported that the USA, Israel and Egypt have supplied factions of Fatah with arms and money in order to topple Hamas. The results are now clear for everyone to see. This constitutes a most serious setback when unity of all patriotic forces is so indispensable. Palestine's destiny is at the crossroads.



**Palestinians celebrate Hamas' election victory**

The main responsibility for this disaster lies with the USA, EU and obviously Israel. Instead of fostering division and disunity they should have been following President Mbeki's advice of 'ending all measures intended to isolate the Palestine Authority,' release funds, reduce misery, and 'create a climate conducive to peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.'

He likened the factional violence to South Africa's 'black on black' violence well known pre-1994, and linked to old order apartheid security elements. This brings to mind that awful aim of Israel's General Eytan and his 'drugged cockroaches in a corked bottle' phraseology which spelt out Israel's war of attrition - the objective of which has been to pit Palestinian inmate against inmate in sealed Bantustan-style prisons.

To understand these developments we need to consider the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This stems from the aims of the Zionist project from its founding in 1897 - its belief in a perpetual anti-Semitism that requires that Jewish people around the world (a faith group) should have an exclusive ethnic national home of their own. They evoked the biblical narrative

to proclaim Palestine as the promised land reserved exclusively for God's 'chosen people' and their civilizing mission. It sounds all too familiar as a vision the colonisers had in this country and elsewhere; giving rise to racism, apartheid and a total onslaught on those who stand in the way, whether blacks or Arabs or American red Indians. Many Jews do not agree with this Zionist world view, and declare that being anti-Zionism and critical of Israel does not equate with anti-semitism.

Far from being a land without people, as Zionist propaganda falsely proclaimed, to attract and justify colonial settlement, the fact was that an indigenous people lived there, developed agriculture and towns since the Canaanite Kingdom 5,500 years ago as illustrated in the Biblical narrative, archeological findings and scientific research. They mixed, intermarried, many converted to Christianity and subsequently to Islam with the arrival of Arabs in the 7th Century. Most Jews had been expelled by the Romans but looked to Jerusalem, as did the other faith groups, as a spiritual but not a geographic home.

At the time of the 1947 UN Partition Plan, designed without consulting the

Palestinians, the Zionists initially accepted the 56% of Mandate Palestine on offer. From such a springboard they launched a vicious campaign of massacres, terror and ethnic cleansing in which 750,000 of 1,250,000 Palestinians in 1948 were summarily dispossessed of their land and expelled. By 1949, Israel had expanded its land grab to 78% of historic Palestine.

This made way for the establishment of an exclusivist Jewish frontier State – indeed a racist supremacist state. During the 1967 War, Israel finally gained control though military occupation of the remaining 22% of what was historic Palestine and seized the Golan Heights from Syria. The Sinai Peninsula was also occupied but returned to Egypt following the 1973 October war.

Those Palestinians who managed to remain within Israel's 1948 borders live as discriminated citizens in a virtual apartheid-type existence. So impressed was Dr. Verwoerd, that he stated admiringly in 1961: 'The Jews took Israel from the Arabs after the Arabs had lived there for a thousand years. Israel like South Africa is an apartheid state.'

Israel succeeds in ignoring various United Nations resolutions such as withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders, Right of Return of the refugees, and cessation of its illegal settlement project because it functions under the umbrella of American protection and acts as its imperialist base in the oil-rich Middle East. It has gained added impetus in its aggression (eg. last year's Lebanon invasion), for its role in the 'frontline of the Global War on Terror'. The USA continues to provide billions of dollars in economic and military aid.

It is imperative that all progressive forces need to deepen their solidarity with the Palestinians in their hour of need and particularly in this fortieth year of Israeli occupation and almost sixtieth year of the 1948 ethnic cleansing. The world must unite against all remaining forms of occupation, colonialism and apartheid.

We must continuously encourage the Palestinians to unite in order to obtain an independent and sovereign state free of the clutches and influence of others. The strategy of divide-and-rule must be defeated. It is worth while to be reminded of the emphasis another people placed on unity in these words of Ho Chi Minh: 'Victory comes from the unity of the people; the greater the unity the greater the victory.' We South Africans concur. ●

## SACP mourns death of Cuban revolutionary

Cuban revolutionary leader Cde Vilma Espín Guillois died in Havana on 19 June this year at the age of 77. She was a member of both the Central Committee and the PolitBuro of the Communist Party of Cuba. She was a member of the Cuban Council of State (the Cabinet) and founder and president of the 3,5-million-member Federation of Cuban Women.

She fought alongside Castro brothers Fidel and Raul – later to become President and Defence Minister of Cuba – and Che Guevara in the armed struggle to overthrow US-backed military dictator General Fulgencio Batista and remained a militant leader of the Cuban revolution throughout her life. Among her many achievements, she was the driving force behind Cuba's revolutionary Family Code of 1975 which gives women equal rights and obliges husbands by law to share housework and childcare.

At its June meeting, the Central Committee of the SACP issued the following tribute to Cde Vilma:

The SACP received the sad news of the passing away of Comrade Vilma Espín Guillois, a courageous and true revolutionary Cuban fighter, following a long illness.

Our party conveys its heartfelt condolences to the family of comrade Vilma, her relatives, to the Communist Party of Cuba and the State and all the people of Cuba. The hard work and contributions of comrade Wilma started at an early age. She later served in the CPC Central



Cde Vilma Espín Guillois

Committee, the Politburo, the National Assembly and the Council of State.

For us many miles away, her hard work incarnates the existing links of the Cuban struggle to our South African revolution, firmly anchored with the blood of the Cuban people who died defending justice and to prevail over a brutal, racist and patriarchal system of domination, gender oppression and exploitation.

Comrade Wilma has diligently served the people of Cuba which for many years remains a major focus of US military aggression and imperialism

We salute comrade Wilma through the call for the greater unification of the Cuban people in defense of their revolution. ●

## Release Cde Aung San Suu Kyi!



The SACP demands the immediate release from house arrest of Cde Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the Burmese National League of Democracy, by the repressive Burmese regime. Cde San Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for her role in the struggle for democracy, was recently placed under renewed house arrest by the Burmese military regime. The SACP condemns this in the strongest possible terms, and calls for the immediate release of Cde San Suu Kyi, and restoration of full democracy.