

The State cannot wait

by Ludwig Watzal

THE sooner the Palestinian leadership proclaims the sovereign state of Palestine within the borders of 1967, the better. The longer President Yasser Arafat delays his decision, the less territory will be left for the Palestinians to set up a state in. The Palestinians have nothing to lose. Their alternative can only be a bantustan, or ghetto.

On April 3 this year I suggested in an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, that the proclamation of a Palestinian state should be on May 14 of this year. Such timing would have made sense in that the Palestinians would have pushed for statehood on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Israel, and also because speed is of the essence.

With the establishment of Israel, the systematic destruction of the Palestinian people began; a tragedy that remains unresolved. The peace process under Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, and now under the nationalistic Israeli government is the continuation of that same tragic occupation - only this time it is with the consent of the US and its western European allies. There is little doubt that the peace process was initiated to tranquilize the western mind into feeling that justice was being done, while strengthening both the interests of Israel and

the US.

In the same way the Palestinians were given 'autonomous areas' which rapidly became isolated bantustans, proves they must be very wary of any future deal on statehood.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' call for the establishment of a Palestinian state after he met President Yasser Arafat on April 26 of this year, is a case in point. As long as the Labor Party does not give exact figures about the size of this 'state', its policies differ little from Netanyahu's. Specific dimensions are much more important than vague promises. In the same way US First Lady Hillary Clinton's call for a state does not mean much either, since it was probably based on an instinct that the Palestinians are human beings too, with human aspirations - hardly the basis for the serious state building the Palestinians will shortly need to undertake.

Above all, what Hillary Clinton said is old news anyway. Whether Bibi Netanyahu likes it or not, the State of Palestine exists in theory. It exists as the 'Phantom State' proclaimed by the PLO in Algiers in 1988, and recognized by over 120 states. Palestinian statehood is not explicitly mentioned in the Oslo Accords, but with the agreements predicated on refer-

ences to 'borders' and 'neighbors', it is effectively an interstate agreement.

The current problem for the Palestinians is not one of worrying over whether there will be a state. The theory is sound: Having accepted a term like 'borders,' Israel has accepted a Palestinian state. The issue of the day is where those borders will be. Although the West Bank and Gaza Strip as the nucleus of a state is undisputed in the whole world, Israel will still do much to scuttle Palestinian claims on that land.

According to international law, the Palestinian territories fulfill the requirements for its establishment as a state. Yet why do the western countries of Europe not encourage Arafat to take this important step? Are they still afraid of Israel's enormous influence in world politics, especially in the US?

International law also decrees that the ongoing occupation by Israel of territory since June 1967, is forbidden. This fact would come into the open after the proclamation of Palestine. Israeli policy constantly violates international law and its protector, the US, sanctions those illegal practices. Why does the EU never speak out?

In law, and in theory, the Palestinians are strong, but in politics they are weak, as they

face a strong rejectionist front led by Israel and the US. Yet the very proclamation of a state would give international law a stronger standing against power politics forcing the international community to stand by its principles.

The proclamation of a Palestinian state is not in the power of Israel. It is a sovereign act of the Palestinian leadership. Such an act would demonstrate to the whole world who the rejectionist powers in the region are. Both Israel and the US would be isolated in the whole world community, and in the end, they would have to give in to international pressure and to international law. Yet, to wait for the proclamation of the state in May 1999 could be too late. The US and Israel will do everything to force a poor compromise - so the time for Palestine to act is now. As Netanyahu's media advisor David Bar-Illan said, "They have foreign relations. They have embassies. If they declare a state tomorrow, I'm sure the whole world will recognize it."

Perhaps Arafat should seize on Mr Bar-Illan's words soon. Land seizures by Israel could otherwise reduce the future state into a few dunums, and the opportunity will be lost.

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