

## ISRAEL IS AN APARTHEID STATE: A NOTE TO THE “VANGUARD LEADERSHIP GROUP”

On April 7th, 2011, an African American student group known as the “Vanguard Leadership Group” (VLG) sparked a flurry of activity and discussion with its circulation of a statement criticizing the use of the term “apartheid” by Palestine solidarity activists. In particular, in an article published in the Jewish Telegraph Agency (JTA), they alleged that “Students for Justice in Palestine has chosen to manipulate rather than inform with this illegitimate analogy.”

We, the signatories of this statement, do not believe that "apartheid" is an inaccurate term to describe the conditions in Palestine. Apartheid is defined by the United Nations 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.” The strategy of arguing over the term “apartheid” is intended to deflect the actual conditions that Palestinians face as a result of the institutionalized racism of the State of Israel.

Apartheid is not a term exclusive to South Africa. In fact, the United Nations itself, in a 1973 resolution, explicitly states that its usage is not confined to the South African case<sup>1</sup>. In addition, well-known individuals, like former President Jimmy Carter in his book *Palestine: Peace, not Apartheid*, have given depth to the apartheid ‘analogy’ by demonstrating the concrete realities of racial separation as it has unfolded in the Occupied Territories.

Others, such as South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, have long been outspoken in comparing the conditions that existed in apartheid South Africa with those faced by Palestinians today. In his own words: “What I saw in the Holy Land reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. I have seen the humiliation of the Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about.”

Do the students of VLG presume to know better than Tutu what apartheid is?

A few examples give meaning to the ‘apartheid’ analogy--for example, at least 40% of the land in the West Bank is now inaccessible to Palestinians for residence, agriculture, transportation, or commerce; or the existence of entire road systems that are restricted to Israelis alone; the continuing ethnic cleansing of occupied East Jerusalem; and of course, there is the so-called ‘Separation Wall’, which is condemned by the International Court of Justice. This apartheid wall has divided the West Bank into isolated segments very similar to the Bantustans of South Africa in which Palestinians live isolated from their own families and communities.

Furthermore, the problem of apartheid extends beyond the Occupied Territories. Ninety-three percent of the land in Israel is managed by the Israel Lands Administration whose interests are in preventing the purchasing, leasing or renting of land to those who are not Jewish. Several cases of attempts by Israeli citizens to rent to Palestinian families have been brought before the Supreme Court because of government interference. The Israeli government, for instance, denies Palestinian citizens of Israel the right to marry and raise a family in Israel with someone from the Occupied Territories. We would point the VLG to the racially segregated school systems which exist within Israel itself, or the fact that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, expelled from Palestine beginning in 1948, have never been granted the internationally recognized "right of return" to their homes of origin. And discussions have been underway in Israel that, while originating among the so-called right-wing fringes, have now shifted to the so-called mainstream circles proposing to remove Palestinian citizens of Israel entirely from the country and relocate them in either the Occupied Territories or some other Arab country.

For these and other reasons, the VLG’s ad is inappropriate and historically inaccurate. The origins of the apartheid analogy are rooted in the history of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, off of which the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement is based. Should the leaders and members of the VLG have any further questions regarding the appropriateness of the "apartheid" label, they may wish to

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/res/3068\(XXVIII\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/res/3068(XXVIII))

consult the leading organizations from South Africa that played a major role in ending the South African apartheid system, such as the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. All of these organizations have repeatedly drawn the connection between the experience of the South African people (under apartheid) and the Palestinian people (under Occupation in the Territories, oppression within Israel, and those expelled from Palestine to other parts of the world).<sup>2</sup>

We, the signatories of this note, believe that the VLG's ad is not only harmful to the cause of justice for the Palestinian people, but exposes a lack of knowledge about the history and conditions of South African apartheid.

**We invite the members and leaders of the VLG to engage with us in further discussion.**

Signatories\*

Barbara Lubin, Middle East Children's Alliance  
Barbara Harvey, Jewish Voice for Peace  
Bill Fletcher, Jr., editorial board of BlackCommentator.com  
Chokwe Lumumba, Esq  
Colia Clark, Manhattan Green Party and Producer, MNN Public Television  
Gerald Lenoir, Executive Director, Black Alliance for Just Immigration  
Hatem Bazian, Chair, American Muslims for Palestine  
Kali Akuno, National Coordinator, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement  
Luci Murphy, Paul Robeson Award Recipient 2007, Artist Against Apartheid  
Monadel Herzallah, National Coordinating Committee, US Palestinian Community Network  
Meizhu Lui, author, The Color of Wealth  
Phil Hutchings, Black Alliance for Just Immigration

*\*Affiliation for identification purposes only*

Organizational signatories

Artists Against Apartheid  
Movement to End Israeli Apartheid-Georgia  
US Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel  
US Palestinian Community Network

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see: <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2010/cosat-statement-in-support-of-israeli-apartheid-week-657>