

Communicating Palestine



By Salem Barahmeh

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s it is with many things related to Palestine, debates on how to communicate Palestine to the world can be fierce and divergent, with no shortage of grand visions or ideas on the use of the most contemporary tactics. These debates are as common in living rooms as they are in board rooms, featuring endless variations on the who, the what, and the how. What is offered here is yet another opinion forged in between a living room and a board room at a time when hope and a positive vision for the future are hard to come by.

The notion of “communicating Palestine” has been an inherent component of the Palestinian national struggle since its inception because of the stark asymmetry of power between us and our oppressor. The understanding is: as we seek liberation, freedom, and rights, it is essential to internationalize our demands and appeal for support and solidarity in an attempt to level this imbalanced equation of power.

You do not build an entire national strategy on more effective communication. This has never been the case and should never be. However, as long as the asymmetry of power exists, communicating Palestine by mobilizing publics, their opinions, and their actions will not only be a critical pillar of our national strategy but also a vehicle for it.

The Who

At the moment, our national movement is on its deathbed and there seems to be no effort to revive it. As a people, we are socially, politically, and geographically fragmented – with each Palestinian community’s struggle localized to its immediate reality. We are gripped by political divisions and gridlock; and our institutions have become outdated and out of touch.

The biggest asset of our national movement has always been its people, not its systems or institutions. While rebuilding what has failed us is important, it should not impede or postpone our need to move forward collectively as agents for change or to reach and mobilize people around the world to support our struggle.

The What

Communicating Palestine at this juncture must recognize and move beyond the lack of a unifying national strategy and bridge the solution-centric schisms that dominate and cripple our politics. What we all share as Palestinians – regardless of where we are from and what our immediate reality might be – are national aspirations rooted in and guided by the values and principles of freedom, equality, justice, and rights.

The pursuit of these values and principles is not confined to being Palestinian but is part of a shared

During this dark chapter, who should we rely on? The 13 million Palestinians around the world and those who stand with us and want to be on the right side of history.

humanity that recognizes them as normative pillars for any society. Yet, they are under attack the world over. Forces that represent hate, tyranny, oppression, and injustice want to build a world with alternative realities. As Palestinians we have lived these realities through decades of dispossession, oppression, occupation, and apartheid – we know these forces very well. Our struggle for these universal values and principles against these dark forces must come



to define us more than anything else and represent to the world what we stand for. Communicating Palestine is very much a narrative of building solidarity by showing the world that our struggle and theirs is one and the same.

The How

Central to any form of communication is narrative. The ability to communicate is measured by how well one's narrative can resonate with and move others. It is both the identity of something and its expression. The narrative, as defined here, doesn't belong to a person, entity, institution, or solution but to Palestinians and anyone who chooses to stand with them. Its legitimacy is derived from the people, and as such it is incumbent on every person who stands for these values to represent and promote it. Its expression does not extend only to the political, but to art, culture, sports, literature, business, media, economy, and any facet of life inherent to those universal principles that should not be taken for granted in 2019. Everything we communicate and everything we seek to change must be underpinned by these values. Through this narrative we also have a vehicle that redefines the landscape by introducing a more nuanced and credible discourse, expanding our ability to engage with different publics and humanizing our struggle and the association with it.

As the world changes and the tug of war between competing visions for the future unfolds, long-term trends give room for optimism. The millennial generation (largest in history) and those to follow it are the most ethnically diverse, educated, progressive, socially conscious, and justice-driven generations in history. They form the largest and most engaged constituencies against the

forces that stand for hate, tyranny, oppression, and injustice. Reaching these generations without filtration and the bias of traditional media and institutions is possible. These generations are the most digitally connected in history, and digital channels are accessible to us all to engage with them directly.

As we communicate Palestine built on a narrative of shared values and principles, these generations of the future will be our global counterparts. They could form the backbone of a solidarity movement that will speak up and stand for Palestine.

Conclusion

The who, the what, and the how as articulated here do not offer an alternative for a national strategy. However, they recognize the importance of communication to our national movement and offer a vision that is built on people, values, and future trends. This vision represents aspirations of how we can engage with the world and mobilize publics to stand on the right side of history by aligning with normative values that advocate for just, free, and equal societies built on rights rather than on oppression and tyranny.

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