

The Russell Tribunal on Palestine

It's all déjà vu these days – from Israeli plans to uproot Bedouins, to storming Al-Aqsa Mosque, and everything under the sun in between. The crimes continue unabated. Gazans still wait for the siege to end and reconstruction to commence while they try to heal their deep wounds. Both public and private institutions, and of course the government as well, suffer from a dire economic situation and lack of funding, Fatah and Hamas sign yet another reconciliation agreement, and the list goes on.

It's also déjà vu at the United Nation's General Assembly. If you're interested in international politics, it's the Super Bowl of all events. True, during General Assembly sessions, there were cases that could be considered benchmarks; for example when Nikita Khrushchev addressed the UN General Assembly on September 23, 1960, and pounded his shoe on his delegate-desk, or Yasser Arafat's speech in 1974 when he said, "I appeal to you to enable our people to establish national independent sovereignty over its own land. Today I have come bearing on olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand." And one shouldn't forget Hugo Chavez's address to the General Assembly in 2006 when he was quoted as saying, "The devil came here yesterday. Yesterday, the devil was here in this very place. This rostrum still smells of sulfur." All in all, however, it's public relations speech after speech in an institution whose members are essentially the whole world, but which has proven to be incapable of enforcing any of its resolutions.

On September 24 and 25, a not-so-common event took place. The Russell Tribunal on Palestine (RToP) held a two-day extraordinary session in Brussels on the crimes that were committed by Israel during operation Protective Edge on the Gaza Strip, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. The RToP is an international people's tribunal created by and composed of a large group of eminent citizens, including Israelis, involved in the promotion of peace and justice in the Middle East. The Russell Tribunal has no legal status but acts as a court of the people, a tribunal of conscience. The legitimacy of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine does not come from a government or any political party but from the prestige, professional interests, and commitment to fundamental rights of the members that constitute this tribunal.

At the end of the testimonies, Roger Waters, judge at the RToP and Pink Floyd music legend, said to the witnesses: "You have led us very eloquently into hell today. This is heart-breaking."

"More than 90% of Gaza's agricultural output [was] destroyed by Israel over [the] summer, almost all farms [were] destroyed. Israel destroyed 220 factories in Gaza, this constitutes around 70% of Gaza's industrial output [-] gone ... I stayed in Gaza for one month in a house with 72 Palestinian civilians, 60 of whom had been displaced. It was overcrowded, tap water wasn't working anymore ..." *Martin Lejeune, German journalist.*

"We found one of 89 families completely liquidated during Operation Protective Edge so badly burned/destroyed [that] they had to be buried in a mass grave by a bulldozer – evoking memories of the darkest times in European history. On [the] outskirts of Rafah, I heard testimony from 19-year-old Mohammed Abu Said of how Israeli soldiers stripped him naked and sniped at neighbours, then set the dogs on him in between shooting rounds...." *Max Blumenthal, American author, journalist, and blogger.*

In a press conference at the end of the session, the Russell Tribunal on Palestine demanded that the international community end the Israeli occupation and enable the Palestinians to exercise their right to self-determination. The *Scriptonite Daily* main header on September 25 was "Israel Was Tried for War Crimes Today, the Testimony Will Break Your Heart."



Sani P. Meo
Publisher