

# National Liberation: Adapting Strategies

By The Negotiations Affairs Department

On November 15, 1988, during the first year of the first Intifada, the Palestine National Council met in Algiers to declare the independence of the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders. This move came not only as a conclusion to years of political dialogue between the PLO and several countries, but also as a result of internal discussions about the best way forward in order to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. After the declaration, drafted by the late Mahmoud Darwish and read by late President Yasser Arafat, thousands of people jubilantly took to the streets of the occupied country and raised Palestinian flags, from the beaches of Gaza to the Old City of Jerusalem.

The first Intifada marked a shift in the national liberation movement, moving from armed struggle, carried out mainly from outside of Palestine, to popular resistance in the streets. It was a popular struggle where all segments of society could contribute, from daily demonstrations to popular education, distribution of food, and cultural activities. The Palestinian people's steadfastness forced the international community to take action, leading first to the Madrid Conference and later to the Washington Talks and the Declaration of Principles (DOP), known as the Oslo Accords. All talks were based on the same principle: end the Israeli occupation that began in 1967. Adopted in 1994, the DOP set a five-year limit for final-status negotiations leading to the two-state solution.

The two-state solution is the Palestinian adoption of an international formula. Historically, the Palestinian demand was to establish an independent, secular Palestinian state across all of historical Palestine with equal rights for its inhabitants. Thus, the Palestinian recognition of Israel on the 1967 borders was and still is the painful compromise. Nevertheless, the Palestinian people supported the prospects of this historic compromise for the sake of achieving a final-status agreement with Israel. The paradigm imposed by the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) was about building the institutions of the Palestinian state while negotiating peace.

The national movement would move its center of gravity from the diaspora to the homeland in order to bring forth the MEPP. However, Israeli intransigence over its



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colonial-settlement plans, as well as a lack of accountability on the part of the international community, led to a total collapse of the process. The promises made by the international community were left unfulfilled, and although heavy investments in institution building were made, little was done in order to achieve a political agreement.

Oslo was seen as a historic opportunity to lay the foundation for a Palestinian state. Building capacity for the State of Palestine became the top priority as at least 250,000 Palestinians returned after decades of exile. However, the optimism that erupted from the prospects of an independent Palestinian state began to disappear in 1996, as Benjamin Netanyahu became Israel's prime minister with promises to prevent the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Soon more settlements and their related infrastructure would be built throughout Occupied Palestine and the five-year "interim period" became the "endless period." The second Intifada (which began on September 28,

2000) was Israel's excuse to destroy Palestinian infrastructure, and within months, with the complicit inaction of the international community, Israel was able to turn back the clock and prolong and expand its settler-colonialism.

After the collapse of the Oslo process, several attempts to resume the negotiations process were initiated – each one failing. The "What Went Wrong?" analysis resulted in the same result: lack of accountability. The culture of impunity that surrounds Israel and allows it to continue to reject its obligations under signed agreements, international law, and UN resolutions was encouraged by countries that invested resources in the two-state solution through the development of Palestinian infrastructure. Meanwhile the international community was unwilling to take concrete actions against Israeli colonial-settlement policies that continued to sabotage any attempts to carry out a meaningful negotiations process.

The bilateral negotiations approach,

Palestine would like to acknowledge:



## Stephen Hawking

A world-renowned scientist and bestselling author who is vocal about his support for Palestine, Hawking made a bold move in 2013 to join the academic boycott of Israel in the name of Palestinian justice. In support of Palestinian youth and scientists, Hawking sponsored the first and second Palestinian Advanced Physics books.

Palestine would like to acknowledge:



## Stéphane Hessel

A Holocaust survivor who served as a French ambassador, diplomat, and writer, Hessel was a strong advocate for the Palestinian cause and a supporter of the BDS movement.

without any mechanisms of accountability, was an excuse for states not to intervene. Israel continued its colonial-settlement enterprise, and in the name of the peace process, continued business as usual, signing important international treaties, including its Association Agreement with the European Union, further entrenching the occupation at the expense of Palestine.

Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of the past, in which the PLO would enter into another interim agreement that Israel would prolong into perpetuity, the PLO pushed for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, while the international community rushed to buy time for Israel.

Forced to adapt to disappointing realities of Israel's lack of accountability, the Palestinian approach to end the occupation and gain its own state had to shift once more. By 2010, after the failure of the Annapolis process, Palestine pushed for three parallel strategies.

1. **Internationalization:** Recognition for the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders through diplomatic efforts, UN membership, and becoming a state party to international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
2. **Institution building:** Strengthening the Palestinian presence on the ground through the development of infrastructure and institutions, and providing the Palestinian people with the means to stay on their land despite Israeli policies of forced displacement
3. **Popular resistance:** Local committees were established in order to lead non-violent demonstrations against Israeli colonial-settlement activities, including the Annexation Wall.

A combination of these three elements strengthened Palestinian leadership and resulted in upgrading Palestine's status

at the United Nations to non-Member Observer State, thereby raising to 138 the number of states that recognize the State of Palestine, including Russia, Brazil, Sweden, South Africa, India, and the Holy See. Though this momentum has brought the Palestinian diplomatic position to its strongest point since the Nakba of 1948, it was not enough to end 50 years of belligerent Israeli military occupation.

In parallel, Palestine called for broader international involvement in any possible negotiations process. Initiatives such as the Paris International Peace Conference, which Palestine supported and Israel unsurprisingly rejected for fear of international interference in order to implement a negotiated agreement, stalled unceremoniously. No economic peace plan can succeed without a political solution that involves the fulfillment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian cause is not merely about the land, it is also about the people of Palestine. Empowering the Palestinian people to stay on their land is the most important theme of resistance against the Israeli colonial-settlement enterprise that aims to take the land and expel the people. From the Balfour Declaration, when British colonialists gifted Palestine to the Zionist movement while referring to the Palestinians as the "non-Jewish population of Palestine," to the Palestinian flag raised at the United Nations in 2015, the Palestinian national liberation struggle has gone through several stages. Throughout, the Palestinian people have persevered. In the words of the late national poet Mahmoud Darwish, "Standing here, staying here, permanent here, eternal here, and we have one goal, one, one: to be."

*The PLO Negotiations Affairs Department was established in 1994 to follow up on the implementation of the Interim Agreements signed between Israel and the PLO, and to prepare the Palestinian positions for the Permanent Status talks with Israel.*