

Advocacy for Palestine on Social Media

An Instrument of Change



By Nour Odeh

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o the average person, the word advocacy signals an attempt by a group of people to lobby for a good cause. To most, if not all Palestinians, advocacy has been a way of life for decades. Long before the availability of internet and social media, Palestinians understood that succeeding in their struggle for freedom required the widest possible coalition of international solidarity.

Since the 1920s, Palestinians have organized, convened lectures, and used art and many other tools to advocate for their just cause around the world. But these efforts were limited in scope and effect for many reasons, including lack of financial resources as well as presuppositions and biases of a cultural or political nature.

Despite the setbacks and disappointment, Palestinian advocacy persisted following the *Nakba*. By the 1970s, the Palestinian people had become an integral part of an international movement against colonialism and oppression, boasting a wide network of international solidarity that spanned the globe. From Addis Ababa to Madrid, Dublin to San Francisco, Managua, and beyond, human rights advocates adopted the Palestinian cause as their own. This solidarity succeeded in propelling the Palestinian cause from the margins of international politics and conscience to its center, reestablishing the Palestinians as a nation with a just cause for freedom and self-determination in their stolen homeland. While these achievements were politically and legally instrumental in advancing the Palestinian cause, they stood in stark contrast to the marginalization and dehumanization of the Palestinian in mainstream corporate media, particularly in the West. Much work was still needed to change international public opinion.



Cartoon by Carlos Latuff on Facebook censorship of Palestinian accounts (2016).

Fast-forward to the turn of the twenty-first century: the mainstreaming of internet on a global scale revolutionized advocacy for activists throughout the world, particularly the Palestinian people. Instead of laboring to break the iron gates of corporate Western media, Palestinians now had an alternative avenue that was affordable, accessible, and theoretically not subject to censorship. Individual Palestinians, civil society organizations, human rights advocates, and some official institutions took to this new and boundless medium to tell their story.

The introduction of social media provided Palestinians and pro-Palestine groups with the tool they needed to penetrate the censorship filters of corporate media and become part of the conversation. This was no easy task. There were hurdles.

English remains the single most effective language on social media, and activists quickly understood that advocacy in English was not just about language; it was also about cultural nuance. It was not enough to state your point in English. On social media, you have to be ready

(#BDS) Protest against anti-BDS laws on June 9, 2016, in New York. Photo by Erik McGregor/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images.





Human rights. No photo credit available. Source: <https://bit.ly/2Vx4wuC>.

be overlooked. Palestinians from all walks of life who are active on social media can use their timeline as a platform to advocate for Palestine among their friends and colleagues. This kind of advocacy is important because it contributes to the indispensable task of informing and engaging people with various interests. However, in the age of alternative facts and fake news, users must take extra precautions to maintain their credibility, using only verifiable information and avoiding the trap of spreading fake news or rumors.

It is difficult to form a decisive conclusion about the success of Palestinian social media advocacy, due in part to the lack of comprehensive data on the issue. However, there are encouraging indicators. Palestine is part of the international conversation and increasingly, it is a litmus test for progressives, especially in the United States. This is new and refreshing. Worldwide, international support for Palestine is on the rise, surpassing the official positions of governments in Europe, Australia, the United States, and elsewhere. Social media

has allowed for the formation of global alliances based on common principles and neutralizes efforts to isolate the Palestinian cause from others. Despite the rise of nasty populist, right-wing, and racist politics, the conversation today about human rights does not and cannot exclude Palestinians; defending one requires standing up for the other.

I believe that the future is for progressives. The darkness of fundamentalist, populist, racist, fear-mongering politics will be defeated by the openness and free exchange of ideas that social-media networking provides. This conviction provides me and many others with enough hope and energy to push ahead, spread the word, and forge alliances based on convictions, not political expediency or interest. In great part, we have social media to thank for that.

Nour Odeh is a communications consultant who had a successful career in journalism before becoming the first woman to serve as government spokesperson in Palestine.

ⁱ <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-social-media-hasbara-worth-millions-1.5320153>.

ⁱⁱ <https://nwtac.dci-palestine.org/about>.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://twitter.com/AOC/status/1118597784054243328>.

^{iv} <https://mccollum.house.gov/media/press-releases/mccollum-introduces-legislation-promote-human-rights-palestinian-children>.

