



14 May 2024

**Press Release: Al Nakba Day**

15 May 2024 marks the 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1948 Palestinian *Nakba*, meaning “Catastrophe”, in which more than 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced, dispossessed, and expelled from their homes in historic Palestine by Zionist militias and armed forces in a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing. More than 531 Palestinian villages and towns were completely destroyed, and the majority of the Palestinian population were forced to become refugees in neighboring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria) or in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in what has since become the longest standing refugee crisis in the world. The Nakba did not end in 1948: it is an ongoing struggle and a daily reality for the Palestinian people.

In 1967, Israel’s belligerent occupation of the rest of historic Palestine (i.e. the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip) began, as did a new era of intensified colonization, land-theft, annexation, and denial of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the non-negotiable rights to self-determination and to return. Israel, the occupying power, has continuously expanded and tightened its control over Palestine and the Palestinian people since, constructing a vast network of illegal settlements on Palestinian land which it has populated with over 750,000 illegal settlers, and establishing a regime of systematic racial discrimination against Palestinians that amounts to the crime against humanity of apartheid. Israel’s illegal and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip has kept a community of over 2 million people trapped in the world’s largest open-air prison, with no escape from its relentless and repeated military aggressions, for over 17 years, in total disregard of the most basic principles of international humanitarian law. Israel’s current and ongoing genocidal onslaught against the Gaza Strip has created a situation that is both catastrophic and horrifying beyond words. 2.3 million besieged Palestinians in Gaza, half of whom are children, are being massacred, maimed, bombed, orphaned, intentionally starved and forcibly displaced. The casualty toll is sickening: Israel has slaughtered 35,000 Palestinian people, including children, women, men, grandparents, newborn babies, healthcare workers, humanitarian personnel, and journalists. Millions of Palestinian civilians who survive Israel’s bombardments and forced displacements will die of hunger, hypothermia, and disease as Israel, the occupying power, continues to block humanitarian aid (including food, water, medicine, and fuel) from reaching them.

What we have been witnessing for seven agonizing months now is a direct consequence of decades of injustice, inaction, and impunity. For 76 years, the international community, including Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, have failed to achieve justice for the Palestinian people, enforce the two-state solution, end the illegal long-term Israeli occupation, halt Israel’s illegal colonial settlement expansion, lift Israel’s blockade on Gaza, or halt Israel’s genocidal assault against the Palestinian people in Gaza. It is a legal and moral obligation to stop these violations and end Israel’s impunity. Israel cannot continue to be perpetually shielded from accountability, or allowed to act as a state above the law: international law must be applied to all states, without exception. We further call on Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand to immediately recognize the State of Palestine in response to the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and in accordance with international law.

The 1948 Nakba was a catastrophic tragedy, but it was also a failure. Despite the colonizer’s best efforts to destroy us, the Palestinian people have persisted; remaining steadfast, continuing to resist and refusing to be erased or forgotten. The Nakba remains a defining aspect of Palestinian identity, as it is the epicenter of both the Palestinian plight and the collective Palestinian struggle for freedom and justice. This year, we commemorate 76 years of continuous Nakba at a time of unprecedented catastrophe, but also of growing support and solidarity worldwide, when the rights and just cause of the Palestinian people is increasingly recognized at the highest levels of international legitimacy. Today, we reaffirm that the Palestinian people will never cease in our struggle for the fulfilment of the rights of our people, including the right to return and an independent the State of Palestine on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions.

*For more information, please contact the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific.*

