

“The resistance of the Palestinians to the occupation is legitimate,” by José António Gomes

On behalf of MPPM, I welcome the 3rd Meeting for Peace and all the associations and organisations that, under this beautiful motto, "In the 50 years of April, for Peace all of us are not too many!," have wanted to give it shape and meaning - highlighting from the outset the organising bodies that have played a historic role in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, such as CGTP and CPPC, without forgetting MDM and URAP, whose representatives accompany me at this table, among many others.

In the last few days (the quote is from yesterday's *Diário de Notícias*, 27-10-2023), the UN General Assembly heard these words from Palestine's permanent observer at the United Nations, Riyad Mansour: *"Stop the bombs, save lives (...) For millions of Palestinians there is no longer a home to return to (...), for millions, there is no family left to embrace, not by an act of God, but by the act of a government represented in the General Assembly."* Mansour added: *"[Israel] believes that if it says Hamas enough times, the world will not be able to oppose the elimination of [entire families] from the face of the earth." And he questioned "why the world feels the 'pain' of the Israelis so much, but not that of the Palestinians (...): What's the problem? Do we have the wrong faith, the wrong skin colour, the wrong nationality?" "Selective indignation," he added, "is outrageous and needs to stop."*

Friends, both in its own initiatives and in association with other organisations, MPPM (Movement for the Rights of the Palestinian People and for Peace in the Middle East) has taken on the uncompromising defence of a set of values and principles, to which Israel's ongoing war against Palestine (and not, as they say, against Hamas) has tragically given reason. Principles and values that it is time to reaffirm at this 3rd Meeting for Peace, together with the position that, in our view, should be taken at the moment by those defending the cause of a more peaceful, fairer world that respects human rights. To wit:

The siege of the Gaza Strip, the cuts in water, energy, and medicines, the bombings and the forced displacement of its inhabitants to the south, constitute war crimes, violations of international law, including the blockades imposed on emergency humanitarian aid. We are witnessing a massacre, in which the very withdrawal of the population is jeopardised by the bombs. The known list of victims seems to go on and on: at the time of writing, but with a tendency to get much worse, around 7,000 people have died in Gaza, including 3,000 children (not to mention the almost 100 fatalities in the West Bank caused by Jewish settlers and the armed forces); nearly 15,000 people have been injured (1,400, by the way, in the West Bank); 1 million people have been displaced. This collective tragedy of unspeakable proportions is, as we have said, a slaughter that is heading towards genocide.

It extends and amplifies, now in the 21st century, the ethnic cleansing of 1948 which, with the creation of the State of Israel, fuelled the occupation of Palestinian territories and, in subsequent decades, the continuous expansion of Israeli settlements on someone else's land. It also crowns what has been Israel's deliberate disregard for UN resolutions

on the illegitimate occupation of these territories and other illegalities—not to mention, for 75 years, permanent violations of human rights and legal rights:

- with thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, including teenagers;
- with checkpoints, aggressions, humiliations of all kinds, arrests and constant murders, which reached unthinkable proportions during the peaceful Great March of Return in 2018 and 2019, deliberately ignored by the so-called West, whose leaders proclaim "Western values," the right to freedom, democracy and peaceful demonstration;
- with power cuts in the Palestinian territories and limitations on access to water;
- with the constant destruction of property, social facilities and an entire local economy;
- restricting access to the Gaza Sea;
- with provocations, aggressions and killings in Jerusalem, particularly in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound;
- with the curtailment of the citizenship rights of Palestinians living in Israel, thus making this state an apartheid regime.

In this regard, let me read you a short poem I wrote a few days ago (signing it with the literary name João Pedro Mésseder):

PALESTINE

*If they steal your land
if the sea surrounds you
if they do not steal the sky from you
for they cannot steal it*

*but they fill you with fire
that comes from the air
and the house collapses
and crushes your parents
and kills your children
the woman screaming*

*which of your words do they hear
amidst the ruins
of the school or the house
or the new hospital?
In the midst of fear
of crying and screaming
what do you think
that they hear you swear?*

In one of the most politically heated regions on the globe, and where the dispute over natural resources (particularly oil) is most acute, this bloody tension is also an expression of class struggle, in which a state led today by a government of the most extreme right, which possesses nuclear weapons without any limitation or monitoring agreement, and which has one of the best equipped armies in the world, is attacking a defenceless people. A people with a rich and ancient culture that possesses little or nothing and has no right to anything, not even a homeland. And Israel is doing it with the complacency and active support of the United States of America and several European countries - the US, whose priority in international politics is to keep its main ally in the Middle East with ever-strengthening boots of steel, in other words, in the oil region and on the route to Russia, Iran, the Arab countries, and the Asian countries of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

That's why we say, why MPPM—which considers the Palestinians' resistance against the occupation of their country to be legitimate—says that it is urgent to:

- demand the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian territory, a ceasefire, and an end to military terrorism in Gaza and throughout Palestine, including attacks on West Bank villages;
- demand an end to the escalation of the war and its potential spread to the whole of the Middle East - which would be a calamity not only for a region of the world long plagued by wars and terrorism, but also for the whole of humanity;
- demand an end to the complacency and military and financial support of the US and other countries, particularly in Europe, for the warmongering, human rights abusing, and genocidal logic of the state of Israel;
- demand—while respecting the coexistence of two states—decisive progress in the creation of an independent and sovereign state in the territory of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, and guaranteeing the refugees' right of return - thus fulfilling the promises set out in international agreements recognised by the UN, namely those of Oslo, which this year turn three decades old;
- urge the Portuguese government and other governments to listen to the clamour that is being raised around the world in solidarity with the Palestinian people (voices that cannot be silenced, neither by these governments nor by the dominant media) and to demand from these governments positions condemning Israel's violation of international and humanitarian law, and defending the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people;
- recognise that there will only be peace in the Middle East when the roadblocks to peace and the creation of an independent Palestine are lifted.

We are with Palestine and its poets, those of pain and those of hope, like the young poet from Gaza, Yahya Achour (b. 1998), who dedicated this short but beautiful poem to hope for a better future:

THE BEST WAY TO OFFER FLOWERS

My father

didn't give my mother

bouquets of flowers

He gave her

cuttings and shots

(from the anthology of Palestinian poems *As Pedras Têm Entranhas?*, translated by Regina Guimarães and published in 2022)

Palestine will win!

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This is the text of José António Gomes' intervention in Panel 1 – Peace and Disarmament of the 3rd Meeting for Peace held in Vila Nova de Gaia on 28 October 2023.

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