

## **Column: The Palestinian people have an inalienable right to independence**

THE RIGHT OF the Palestinian people to self-determination has been universally recognised by the UN. In particular, UNGA Resolution 3236 which states that the right of independence for Palestine is “inalienable” and that the Palestinian people have a right to a “sovereign and independent” state. Therefore, going to the UN, the “mother of 193 nations” is not a “unilateral act”, as claimed by the Israelis; it is both correct procedure and a civilised course of action.

The right of Palestinians to self-determination is not subject to Israeli censure, or approval, nor is it dependent on negotiations. In fact, UN endorsement of a Palestinian state will not erode the room needed to make difficult compromises for peace, rather it will reinforce international law and salvage prospects for peace based on the two-state solution. The ending of 41 years of Israeli military occupation and the implementation of international law do not qualify as compromises by Israel in anyone’s language; on the contrary it would usher in a new beginning in which Israel and Palestine cooperate as two independent states.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation signed the Oslo Accords and entered into the peace process with the hope that an independent and sovereign contiguous Palestinian State, made up of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, would emerge after the conclusion of a five-year interim period. However, almost 20 years have passed since the signing of the Oslo Accords and Israel has continued to colonise more Palestinian lands and exploit Palestinian resources. Furthering such negotiations mean perpetuation of the “unsustainable status quo” as described by President Obama.

## **Recognition of a Palestinian State will strengthen the prospects of reaching a just and lasting peace**

Recognising the Palestinian State is consistent with the very basis of the Oslo Interim Agreement. The Interim Agreement created the Palestinian National Authority as a transitional body to prepare the institutions of government for the moment when Israel would finally terminate its occupation over our land.

Recognition of a Palestinian State will strengthen the prospects of reaching a just and lasting peace based on the terms of reference accepted by the international community as a basis for resolving the conflict. Importantly, it will affirm respect for UNSC Resolution 242 by rejecting Israel’s colonisation of Palestinian land beyond the 1967 border and the acquisition of territory by force.

It is also consistent with the Arab Peace Initiative, this promises normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab World upon the implementation of the terms of the peace agreement. To end the conflict the parties will still need to discuss how to reach a comprehensive peace agreement on all of the core issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, security, territory and natural resources.

The UK, France and Germany are in support of the establishment of a Palestinian State, with the statement “ Israel’s security and the realisation of the Palestinians right to statehood are not opposing goals. On the contrary, they are intimately entwined objectives” and “our goal remains

an agreement on all final status issues and the welcoming of Palestine as a full member of the UN by Sept 2011. We will contribute to achieving that goal in any and every way that we can”.

Palestine already meets the requirements for statehood under the Montevideo Convention ie, (a) Palestine has a permanent population. (b) it has a defined territory (presently under military occupation) (c) it has a recognised government in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), which continues to build the institutions of a sovereign Palestinian state and (d) Palestine has established relations with other states.

### **World organisations have given their full support for the establishment of a Palestinian State**

In 2009, the Palestinian Authority embarked on a process to complete the building of the institutions of the future Palestinian State.

The European Union has consistently encouraged and supported this endeavour both in terms of financial and technical assistance and with respect to the political objective. This process has encouraged 25 European statesmen who released a statement last July, in support of the Palestinian case for international recognition of their state within the 1967 borders, calling on the European Union to support the case. The statement said that “backtracking from this commitment now would demonstrate inconsistency, weakness and an absence of political will. It would also be to grant a victory to the status quo forces”.

Other important, authoritative and influential world organisations have given their full support for the establishment of a Palestinian State. The World Bank stated “If the Palestinian Authority maintains its performance in institution building and delivery of public services, it is well positioned for the establishment of a state at any point in the near future”. (Sept 2010). The International Monetary Fund stated “The PA is now able to conduct the sound economic policies expected of a future well functioning Palestinian state”. (April 2011). The EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, stated “The Palestinian Authority has made significant progress on this state building agenda. Today Palestinian institutions compare favourably with those in established states”. (April 2011).

Akiva Eldar, Israeli journalist and political analyst has put the position very clearly in the Haaretz newspaper (28 June) when he wrote “in effect recognising a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders would constitute the first recognition of the Green Line (the demarcation line in the 1949 armistice agreement) as Israe’s defined eastern border”. In other words, Israel would become a normal country with internationally recognised borders only when a Palestinian state is established.

### **I believe the Irish are especially sensitive to the predicament in which we Palestinians find ourselves**

As a Palestinian familiar with modern Irish history, particularly the struggle for freedom from colonial British rule, the Declaration of Independence, the convening of Dáil Éireann and the establishment of the Irish Republic, I believe that Irish people are especially sensitive to the predicament in which we Palestinians find ourselves.

We need the support of Ireland and the rest of the world because the nature of our struggle is between the occupied and the occupier. It is a struggle not between competing narratives and not between equal sides at war over disputed territory.

Recognition of the State of Palestine and support for its admission to the UN makes it clear that Israel has no valid claim to any parts of the territory it has forcibly occupied since 1967 and that its colonisation of Palestinian land is illegal.

To recognise the Palestinian State on the 1967 borders, will hopefully be a sovereign decision taken by the member states of the UN. It will be a peaceful act that supports the enforcement of international law and reaffirms the international community's commitment to the two-state solution.

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