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Palestinians need Irish support for crucial UN vote
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Backing at September's general assembly would put the necessary pressure on Israel

OPINION: SINCE 1967, Israel has forcibly controlled all the Palestinian lands outside the 1948 Israeli borders. In the name of self-defence, Israel has maimed and killed tens of thousands of defenceless Palestinians under its occupation; demolished more than 20,000 houses; and divided Palestinian farms with the Israeli security wall. Israel has confiscated more than half the land destined for the Palestinian state, and transferred that land to more than 500,000 Jewish settlers to establish illegal colonies.

Palestinians have been negotiating, over the past 20 years, to bring to an end to Israel's military dictatorship. However, Israel has not respected any of the agreements, from the 1993 Oslo accords, which stated that a Palestinian state would be established in May 1999, to the 1994 Paris protocol and the 1998 Wye River memorandum, to mention just a few that, if implemented by Israel, would have brought lasting peace to the Middle East.

Regrettably, not only Israel but also the powers that witnessed and guaranteed these agreements have failed to uphold their obligations, thereby portraying western democracy as a hypocritical concept. The hypocrisy was reinforced by Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu when he expressed enthusiastic support for the spread of democracy in the Middle East. Speaking in Washington last month, he said: What the people of Israel want is for the people of the Middle East to have what you have in America, what we have in Israel: democracy.

We Palestinians living under Israeli military dictatorship for the past 44 years are perplexed by this duplicity and deceit. If dictatorship is unacceptable in the Arab states today, it is equally unacceptable in the occupied Palestinian territories. In November 1988, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation declared the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, ie the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza. Palestinians accepted the objective of a sovereign state on just 22 per cent of their historic homeland, with Israel remaining on the other 78 per cent. Thus the way has been open for a two-state solution. This has been rejected by the Israelis over the past 23 years, most vociferously by Netanyahu when challenged by US president Barack Obama in Washington last month. Palestinians have no option but to seek international recognition at the United Nations for a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. This we are doing in September.

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 the struggle is between the occupied and the occupier. It is a struggle neither between competing narratives nor between equal sides at war over disputed territory.

True democracy, for us, means that Israel's military dictatorship would be brought to an end by Israel withdrawing to the 1967 borders and allowing a democratic Palestinian state to come into being.

Support for us at the UN in September from Ireland and from all nations that truly believe in democracy is crucial to us. It will win the vote in favour of recognition of a Palestinian state. This recognition will give us the necessary non-violent tools to challenge Israel at every international forum to force it from our territories.

After all, it is the UN that explicitly affirmed in its Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.

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