

A timely wake-up call

an interview with Mahdi Abdul Hadi

bitterlemons: What do you make of the reported Swedish draft resolution on Jerusalem?

Abdul Hadi: There are several elements to this issue. First of all, in presenting this resolution to European countries, Sweden is merely stating what Europe's position has always been, whether in public or private, which is within the framework of United Nations resolutions.

bitterlemons: So there is nothing new in the resolution?

Abdul Hadi: It is a wake-up call from Sweden to the rest of the European community about the status of Jerusalem today. Europe cannot simply leave determining the fate of Jerusalem to final status negotiations because Israel is Judaizing the city every day, making it more and more Israeli. The city is daily losing its character and identity, its history and culture to become an exclusively Jewish city. This is all happening in transgression of international law and in contradiction to what Europeans believe in.

bitterlemons: Why the need for a wake-up call?

Abdul Hadi: Nobody is protecting Palestinians in the face of the onslaught they are facing in Jerusalem and that will only worsen under this right wing Israeli government. At PASSIA, we regularly document the house demolitions, the revocations of Palestinian residency rights, the evictions and the many other hardships Palestinians face in Jerusalem, whether in their daily lives or in trying to reach and defend their holy sites. Palestinians are being uprooted on a daily basis without anyone defending them or even portraying their suffering in international fora.

bitterlemons: Why has Sweden taken on this role on Jerusalem?

Abdul Hadi: It is Sweden's responsibility as the head of the European Union. Out of that responsibility, that duty, Sweden has tackled one of the top priorities on Europe's foreign policy agenda. The resolution is about portraying the situation as it is in Jerusalem, what international law says, where the international community is and what Europe can and should do?

bitterlemons: Will it result in any practical consequences?

Abdul Hadi: It should force Europeans to face their responsibilities in Jerusalem. Europe needs to decide on how to deal with Israel over occupied East Jerusalem and Israeli institutions in East Jerusalem, and return again to dealing with Palestinian representatives from the city and focus more on Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem. Europe has to start dealing with East Jerusalem as it deals with other parts of occupied territory; as it deals with the West Bank.

bitterlemons: But this is how you feel Europe should deal with East Jerusalem. Will Europe do this?

Abdul Hadi: If you go back to the speeches by European leaders at the Israeli parliament for Nakba day, they all in their own ways, whether Nicolas Sarkozy, Gordon Brown or Angela Merkel, explicitly called for a two-state solution with Jerusalem as the capital of two countries. This draft resolution is merely confirming what these leaders said and within the framework of international law.

The new thing now is the right-wing Israeli government, with its greater brutality and even lower respect for international law. Israel is accelerating its actions in Jerusalem and the challenge now is facing down this right-wing government.

bitterlemons: So is this a very timely resolution?

Abdul Hadi: It's similar to the Goldstone report. The Goldstone report was a wake-up call about Israeli atrocities in Gaza. What is happening in Jerusalem is a war crime against Palestinians. Moreover, there is the issue of control of the holy sites. Jerusalem is a capital of the Christian and Muslim faiths as well as the Jewish faith. It cannot be an exclusively Jewish city.

bitterlemons: If Israel succeeds in watering down the resolution what does that mean?

Abdul Hadi: It is not important how the resolution comes out; it's already in the public arena. The exact wording of the resolution will not matter much as long as the wake-up call is heard and shakes things up in Israel as well as in the Arab world. It is a Palestinian, Arab and Muslim responsibility to realize that if European countries can come out with a wake-up call then they too have a responsibility to begin to act.

It has already achieved something positive, but it needs follow-up. I predict that we are about to witness a new chapter of Palestinian-Israeli confrontations in Jerusalem, because this Israeli government is aiming to close more Palestinian institutions and hound out more Palestinian citizens.

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