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Webinar- Ongoing Genocide in Gaza: Blocked Relief and Global Inaction

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) organised a webinar on Thursday, March 7, 2024, addressing the critical issue, [“Ongoing Genocide in Gaza: Blocked Relief and Global Inaction.”](#) This webinar highlighted the dire circumstances in Gaza, focusing on the impediments to humanitarian aid and the broader international community's failure to respond effectively.

The webinar, moderated by activist Insiya Raja, featured a distinguished panel of speakers: Chris Gunness, former Chief Spokesperson for UNRWA; Zaheer Laher, Chief Director of United Nations Political, Peace and Security at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) of South Africa; Jeff Halper, an Israeli Anthropologist, Author, and Political Activist; Michael Binyon, English Journalist and The Times’s Moscow Correspondent; Issa G. Shivji, Tanzanian Author and Academic; Riccardo Bocco, Author and Emeritus Professor of Political Sociology at the Geneva Graduate Institute; Dr. David Monyae, Co-Director of the UJCI, and International Relations and Foreign Policy Expert; and Ibbo Mandaza, Zimbabwean Academic, Author, and Advisory Council Member at FPRI.



Chief Director of United Nations Political, Peace and Security at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) of South Africa, Zaheer Laher, started his speech by pointing out that we are now 152 days into the war that began on October 7, 2023. He shared harrowing statistics reflecting the toll of this war, mentioning that over 30,000 Palestinian lives have been lost, including 12,300 children. With a sombre tone, Laher questioned the global threshold for action, asking when the international community would decide that enough lives have been lost and demanding an end to the "unjust killing."

Laher criticised the prevailing double standards in international law, highlighting the lack of sanctions or actions against countries perceived as more equal. He detailed South Africa's efforts through international judicial avenues, such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, seeking justice for Palestinians.

He recounted the events of January 26, when the International Court of Justice found plausible South Africa's allegations against Israel regarding violations of the Genocide Convention, mandating immediate preventative actions. Despite these orders, Israel had escalated its military operations, particularly in Gaza, undermining international legal mandates and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

Laher also emphasised the dire need for humanitarian intervention to prevent further loss of life, especially in the context of escalating starvation in Gaza.

In conclusion, Laher reiterated the necessity of adherence to international law across all nations, thereby urging the global community to consistently uphold



the principles enshrined in the UN Charter to ensure the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

In his address, Chris Gunness, former Chief Spokesperson for UNRWA, highlighted the aftermath of the International Court of Justice's ruling on January 26, pointing out the baseless accusations made against 12 UNRWA staff members in the New York Times and the subsequent decision by 18 donors to withdraw funding, resulting in a loss of half a billion dollars. Gunness argued that this act was a violation of the ICJ's provisional measures, which explicitly prohibit measures that restrict humanitarian aid.

He then detailed the dire humanitarian consequences of this defunding, particularly the stark evidence of children beginning to starve. Despite these conditions, the European Union, followed by the UK and potentially other nations, announced plans to resume funding, acknowledging the hasty nature of their initial decisions.

Gunness also reflected on his experience as UNRWA's spokesman in 2014, drawing parallels between past and present conflicts. He criticised the propagation of falsehoods, such as the alleged presence of militants in UNRWA schools, which were later disproven through investigations.

The core of his message emphasised the need for accountability and questioned the integrity of the donor countries and the media. He urged an investigation into the procedures that allow politics to influence humanitarian decisions and criticised the journalistic practices that led to unsubstantiated allegations against UNRWA employees.



Gunness concluded by expressing hope that those who withdrew their support would recognise their mistakes and stressing the broader implications of their actions in terms of compliance with international legal standards and the consequences of exacerbating human suffering.

Dr. David Monyae, the Co-Director of the UJCI and an International Relations and Foreign Policy Expert, expressed deep concern over the tragic events unfolding in Gaza, emphasising the daily loss of innocent lives, including women and children. He touched upon the broader implications of these events, questioning the effectiveness and fairness of the international system, particularly in light of the Gaza situation.

Dr. Monyae critiqued the perceived double standards in the application and interpretation of human rights by Western countries, suggesting that the global response to the Gaza crisis highlights a discrepancy between the values professed by Western nations and those of the Global South. He drew parallels between the international reaction to conflicts in Gaza and other regions, such as Ukraine, illustrating a bias in global media and policy.

He called for a unified voice from the Global South to address these disparities and advocated for substantial reforms within the United Nations system, including changes to the veto power dynamics within the Security Council. He criticised the U.S. for its inconsistent application of human rights principles, which, he argued, reveals an inequality in the application of international law.



Dr. Monyae emphasised the need for broader representation within the United Nations Security Council to include diverse perspectives from the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. He expressed disappointment in the Western intellectual and media response to the Gaza crisis, contrasting it with their active engagement in other human rights issues.

Furthermore, Dr. Monyae highlighted the silence of influential Western figures and organisations that typically advocate for human rights but have been notably absent or less vocal regarding Gaza. He concluded by reiterating the Global South's call for action and attention to human rights violations worldwide.

Jeff Halper, the prominent anthropologist, author, and political activist, emphasized the severity of the situation in Gaza, describing it as a genocide within the broader context of Zionism's settler-colonial project in Palestine. He underscored that the current crisis is an exacerbation of a long-standing process of incremental genocide against Palestinians, tracing its origins back to pre-1948 events.

Halper critiqued the mainstream discourse on Zionism and settler-colonialism, noting that while the concepts have gained traction, their full implications are often not understood or are oversimplified. He elaborated on the inherent nature of settler-colonialism, which necessitates the erasure and displacement of indigenous populations, explicitly linking this to the Zionist agenda in Palestine.

Highlighting the systematic denial and undermining of Palestinian existence and rights by Israel, Halper portrayed the continuous dispossession and marginalization of Palestinians since the Nakba as integral to the Zionist



enterprise. He connected these policies directly to the ongoing atrocities in Gaza and stressed the necessity of recognizing these events within the broader context of Palestinian oppression, including actions in the West Bank and Area C.

Halper strongly criticised the concept of a two-state solution, arguing that it fails to address the core issues of settler colonialism and effectively amounts to endorsing an apartheid system.

In conclusion, Halper advocated for discontinuing the dialogue on two-state solutions, emphasising the necessity of a unified strategy that redresses the deep-seated injustices endured by Palestinians throughout all territories. In the context of the current genocide affecting the entire Palestinian population throughout Palestine, the requisite political solution would be an anti-colonial strategy that confronts the Zionist colonial endeavour across the whole of Palestine, rather than focusing solely on discrete territories.

In his speech, Riccardo Bocco, an author and Emeritus Professor of Political Sociology at the Geneva Graduate Institute, emphasised the absurdity of the U.S.'s inability to ensure the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza, contrasting it with the costly method of air-dropping food aid. He highlighted the prohibitions placed on health-related items within the aid meant for Gaza, critiquing the inefficiency and inadequacy of these measures.

Bocco pointed out the inadequacy of addressing Zionism solely through its political or right-wing Jabotinsky variant. He highlighted alternative Zionist perspectives, such as those of Martin Buber, who advocated for a binational state, suggesting that these more cooperative, less colonial visions should be revisited.



He underscored the importance of including Palestinian perspectives in these discussions, lamenting the lack of consultation with Palestinians about their desires for the future. Bocco advocated for reinvigorating the Palestinian National Council as a step toward genuinely understanding and incorporating Palestinian voices in the quest for a viable and just resolution.

Issa G. Shivji, a renowned Tanzanian author and academic, began his address by saying that the apartheid policies did not work in South Africa and would not work in Palestine.

Shivji then characterised the events in Gaza as the convergence of imperialism's two most destructive tendencies: war and fascism. He drew parallels between the atrocities in Gaza and the horrors of the Second World War, suggesting that the situation in Gaza represents an even more severe manifestation due to the current state of capitalism, which he describes as a declining, financialised system.

Additionally, he called the aggression in Gaza a form of "racist Zionist fascism" that had the support of imperialist countries, implying a wider geopolitical complicity. Shivji argued that the usual terms like "humanitarian crisis" or "ceasefire violations" are inadequate to capture the scale and nature of the tragedy unfolding in Gaza, suggesting that the struggle there is a fight against fascist imperialism on behalf of humanity at large.

Issa G. Shivji concluded his address with a powerful call to action, emphasising that the global community must unite and collectively raise their voices against the fascist imperialism he identifies in Gaza. He stressed the importance of global



solidarity, asserting that the people of Gaza are not fighting alone but are at the forefront of a broader struggle for humanity. By stating, "Gazans are fighting the war for all of us. They are on the front lines. Our duty is to stand by their side."

In his speech, Michael Binyon, an English journalist and The Times's Moscow correspondent, emphasised the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, highlighting the dire humanitarian situation among the Palestinian civilian population, particularly the impact on children, the scarcity of food, and the obstacles to aid delivery. He framed this crisis as a violation of fundamental human values and expressed disbelief at the international community's failure to effectively intervene.

Binyon identified the United States as having a pivotal role in pressuring Israel to agree to an immediate ceasefire. He also criticised the hardliners within the Israeli cabinet who oppose ceasing hostilities.

Highlighting the logistical challenges of aid delivery, Binyon criticised the inefficiency and irony of the U.S. air-dropping aid while also supplying Israel with the munitions causing the destruction. He called on neighbouring Egypt to facilitate aid passage and on Israel to open its borders for relief supplies.

He underscored the necessity for global unity behind the United Nations to apply significant pressure for a sustainable ceasefire. Binyon recognised the Western media's efforts in depicting the crisis but called for more in-depth reporting to accurately portray the extent of suffering in Gaza. He emphasised the distinction between legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and anti-Semitism. Concluding his



remarks, Binyon advocated for the immediate establishment and enforcement of a ceasefire, expressing his hope for a rapid resolution.

Ibbo Mandaza, a Zimbabwean academic, author, and Advisory Council member at FPRI, focused on the dire situation in Gaza, addressing the issues of genocide and occupation that he sees as central to the Palestinian plight. He remarked on the significant shift in global awareness and engagement with the Palestinian issue since the previous year, suggesting a point of no return in how these matters are perceived and acted upon internationally.

Mandaza emphasised the alarming figures related to casualties in Gaza, mentioning over 30,000 people killed, including 12,000 to 13,000 children, as stark indicators of the crisis. He pointed out the complicity of the global community, especially those supporting Israel, in the ongoing tragedy and violence experienced by the Palestinian people.

Highlighting the urgent need for international intervention, Mandaza posed critical questions regarding the cessation of genocide and the end of the occupation, identifying these as the immediate challenges that need to be addressed. He underscored the importance of decisive action from the global community to confront and resolve these pressing issues, reflecting a sense of shared responsibility and calling for an end to the suffering in Gaza.

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